The future of electronic entertainment issue#94

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PlayStation I PS2 I N64 I Dreamcast I PC I XBox I GameCube

Unveiled: the premie
wave of XBox games
Previewed: Gun Valkyr
Warhammer Online
Reviewed: Phantasy
Star Online, Grandia
Daytona USA 2001
Plus: sex and violence
has gaming grown up?

XBOX

XBOX

Microsoft

The power of X

Lifting the lid on Microsoft's box of deligh







Microsoft's XBox console appears on the cover of this month's **Edge** because Microsoft wanted its XBox console on the cover of this month's **Edge**.

No, the magazine hasn't sold out: the 2000 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, where Bill Gates was handed a mic in order to deliver the keynote address, just happened at the right time for this month's deadline. (Read the full report detailing the company's hardware unveiling on p6.)

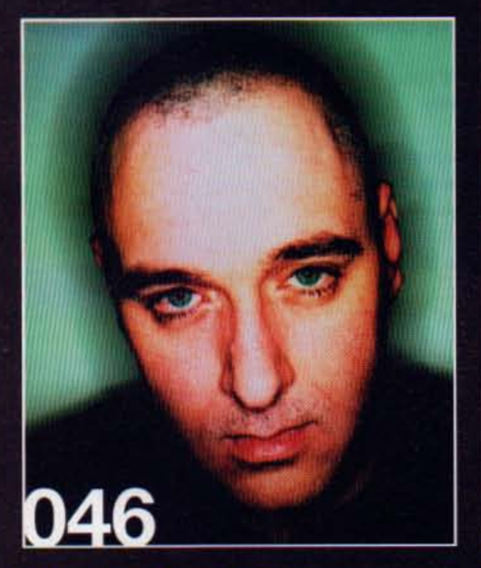
But there is an intriguing information-distribution dynamic at work here. Having sat on the sidelines and observed the headlines handed out to Sega, Sony and Nintendo over the last 12 months, Redmond-based software titan Microsoft is building its own dripfeed strategy – one it hopes will garner premium editorial month upon month until its launch at the end of the year. Which is why industry analysts (**Edge** included) have been allowed to hold the XBox console and its joypads, but not been given the opportunity to sample the likes of *Malice* firsthand. That's for another presentation entirely, it would seem.

What does such a considered strategy tell the committed gamer? Well, this: having first faced a potential stumbling block in the form of Bill Gates while they were conceiving their dream, the XBox team are now running with a full head of steam. J Allard, the format's chief evangelist, recently took to the road in order to bring the CES demonstration to a wider audience (WWF wrestler 'The Rock', who joined Gates in Vegas, was presumably stopped in customs), delivering a late-night presentation to a selection of journalists in central London. And, in keeping with military-style plans, the following day, to another set of hacks, his message remained the same one that he must have pinned up against his bathroom mirror while shaving each morning. The same Utopian gaming possibilities were espoused time and again, rubber-stamping the Microsoft touch upon its entry into the most invigorating leisure space in existence.

Behind the rigorously rehearsed sales patter lay a compelling piece of gaming hardware, of course. And, after all, Microsoft is being more forthcoming than Nintendo with regard to its plans for shaping electronic entertainment's future. But then Microsoft does not have the likes of Mario and Zelda within its fold. What lies beyond a striking case design and a bag full of bumpmapped environments will be the true illustration of the company's potential.

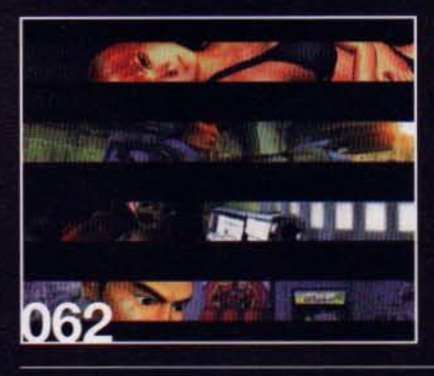


Features











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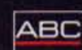
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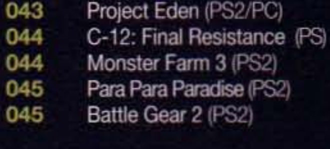








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"Eddie, don't you know you're bad luck?"

frontend ▷▷▷▷

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



XBox comes out of the box

Microsoft formally presents its console, and, despite reservations over controller design, most response is overwhelmingly positive

On January 6, at the 2001 International CES in Las Vegas, Microsoft's Bill Gates unveiled the final appearance of the XBox and its controller with the assistance of WWF wrestler The Rock. As well as showing off demos of two exclusive XBox titles, *Malice* and *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee* – apparently running on dev kits that feature 20 per cent of the finished console's power – it was confirmed that *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2x*, from Activision, and *WWF Raw Is War*, from T*HQ, will also appear on the console. Later in the week *Colin McRae Rally 2x* was added to the roster.

XBox looks

Edge was able to catch a glimpse of the console first hand thanks to **J Allard**, general manager for XBox platform, who visited Europe to demonstrate the finished black box to journalists and answer questions. Speaking the day after CES, Allard was pleased with the feedback that he had received so far: "We were really pleased, because CES is not just about the game industry, and this is our first show that's not been about the game industry where we really talked about it for the first time to broad consumers. People are really into the design, and they've said that they weren't expecting something as cool or as sleek from Microsoft, and that they thought it captured the enthusiasm and excitement behind gaming. But the most important thing is that people were excited about the demos of *Malice* and *Oddworld* running on dev kits that are just a fraction of the performance of the finished Xbox." In terms of the design of the unit, based on research conducted among 5,000 console owners worldwide, he compared it to a hi-fi component. Certainly it does boast some of the stylistic features of a high-end amp, while retaining some of the design themes of the prototype X, which was so well received when it was originally announced. The most surprising aspect, though, was the size of the device. Larger even than the 3DO or Saturn, Allard claimed that this was largely because of the power needed to supply the internal architecture: "If you were to take a Dreamcast power supply and pop it in here and turn it on, you'd get the graphics chip running. That's it. So we have a big power supply that needs a little space." No doubt Microsoft also hopes that users won't have any room under their TV for any rival consoles, but it was apparently also a high

"People are into the design, and they've said that they weren't expecting something as cool or sleek from Microsoft, and that they thought it captured the excitement behind gaming"





The sizeable X motif which straddles the convex surface of the unit sits uneasily with the overall styling of the unit, which is reminiscent of a piece of high-end hi-fi kit. The controllers owe a substantial debt to Dreamcast pads, albeit designed more ergonomically, but they aren't ideal

XBox specs

The numbers Microsoft believes will scare Sony

CPU: 733MHz x86
Graphics processor: 250MHz
Total memory: 64Mb
Memory bandwidth: 6.4Gb/sec
Polygon performance: 125m/sec
Pixel fill rate (up to two textures): 4.0G/sec
Maximum resolution: 1920x1080
Storage medium: 2-5xDVD, 8Gb hard disk, 8Mb memory card
Audio channels: 256
Joypad ports: four
Video out: multistandard, via region-specific adaptors
Additional features: 3D audio support, MIDI DLS2 support



The front of the unit is fairly spartan, with the four controller ports the most noticeable element. Allard was keen to stress the positioning of the XBox brand, which is far more pronounced than the Microsoft logo, reaffirming the company's 'all about the games' message

priority to minimise the background hum that characterise other consoles. "We really wanted to design the thing to be acoustically sound, because customers of Dreamcast and PlayStation2 have been pretty frustrated with the amount of noise that their consoles make due to vibration," related Allard. The box itself is relatively sparse, with four controller ports and a front-loading DVD tray, as well as an ethernet connection that can be used for both LAN multiplayer gaming and gaming over a broadband Internet connection.

XBox power

In terms of what will be inside the box, while the speed of the CPU has increased, the speed of NVidia's graphics chip has decreased slightly. Nevertheless, Allard is still bullish about the capability of the finished chip, stating that it will be: "The most badass graphics part in the world when we go to manufacturing," going on to say that the chip, now officially called the NV2A, will feature some of the geometry features from NVidia's NV30.

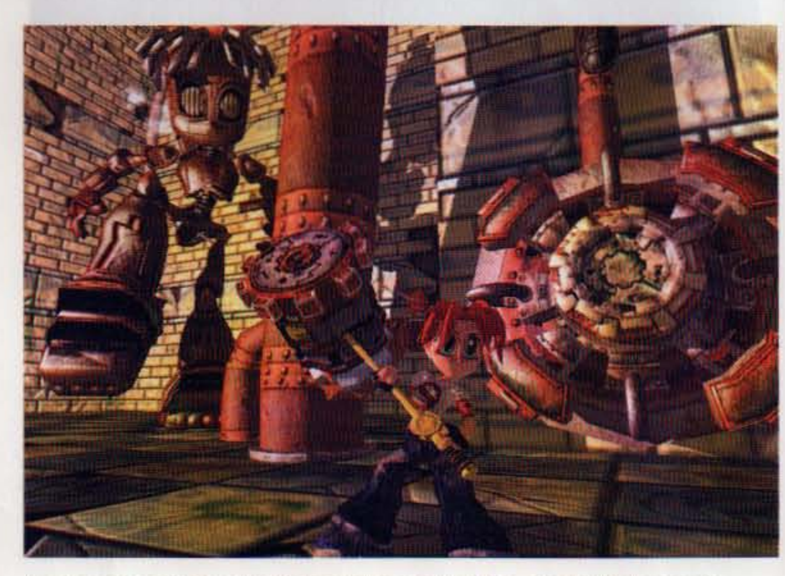
These changes hardly diminish XBox's technically superior lustre, but the area that did prompt some negative feedback was the design of the unit's controllers, as Allard himself conceded. "Some of the not so positive comments were from people expecting more innovation in the design of the controller. My response to that was to ask, 'How would you like to buy a car with the gas pedal on the left, the brake on the right and the gear shift on the door?' It would be innovative, but it wouldn't be very comfortable or functional." In fact, the controller is pleasingly weighty, sits comfortably in the hand, and, in an example of the thoroughness with which Microsoft has thrown itself in to the task at hand, it boasts connection cords that are around nine feet long. Bizarrely, this seemed to be the aspect of the design that had many analysts most excited – more so than the 12Mbit transfer speed between controller and console, and dual motors with separate frequencies that enable more sophisticated vibration effects. But there are real concerns











At this stage screenshots simply do not do justice to *Malice* on a dev kit, but despite beautiful lighting and bumpmapping effects, it seems to fall well within a tired genre

The most noteworthy aspect of the unit's design is its sheer size, which harks back to the days of the Saturn, but the uneasy compromise between simplicity and ostentation is also a noticeable feature



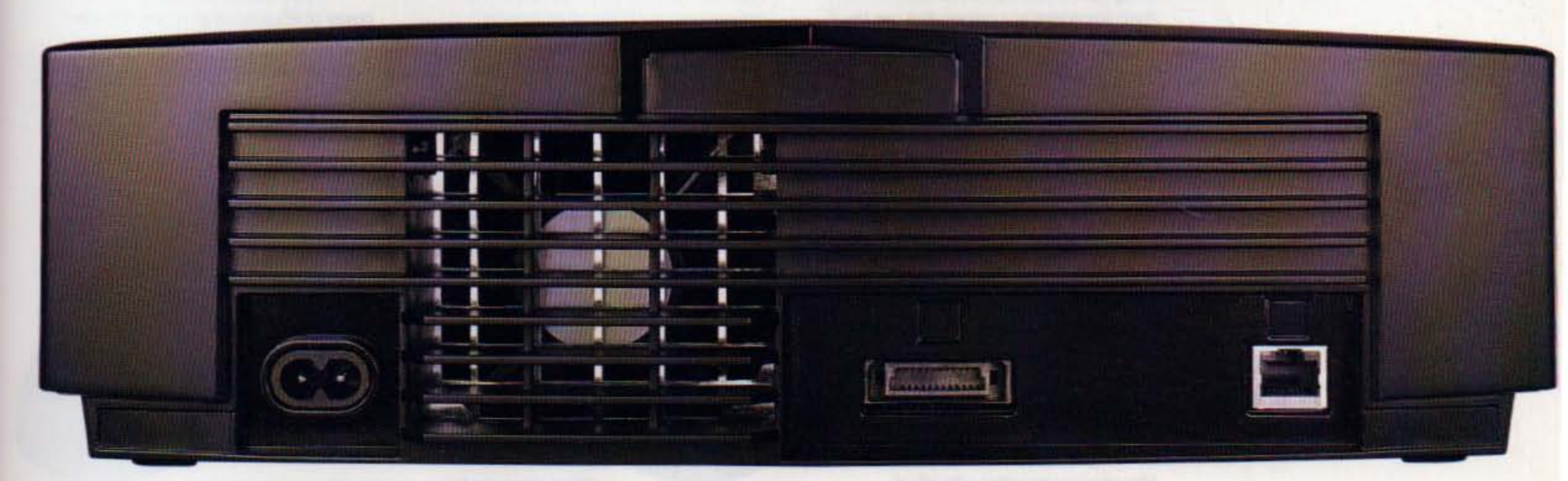
regarding the controller design, which is indeed derivative and uninspiring. The six analogue buttons feel rather loose, and, while the two analogue triggers feel sturdier than their Dreamcast equivalents, this could in fact be a drawback. Turning to the two analogue sticks and D-pad, the right stick gets in the way of the six main buttons, while the D-pad feels cheap, plasticky, and vague. Perhaps **Edge**'s major complaint, though, is that Microsoft has run the risk of over-egging the pudding. In contrast to the GameCube controller, which attempts to simplify the input device, the XBox controller appears to have diluted the purity of the console aesthetic with an element of PC-style over-complication.

XBox thirdparties

Such fears may be allayed by the encouragement that the company is giving to thirdparty manufacturers such as Pelican and MadCatz: "We've licensed a lot of the engineering work that we've done, we've shared that with them so that they can accelerate the process. We also chose to use USB so that other people can do cool stuff like arcade sticks and steering wheels." Indeed, there are a variety of interesting peripherals that are under consideration, particularly to make use of the controllers' two slots. According to research conducted by Microsoft, the option of including VMU functionality was not particularly popular with gamers, but although Allard points to a future where the Internet will make memory cards redundant, they will initially be available in the interests of portability.

Among the more interesting possibilities, though, is a peripheral making use of

"We've licensed a lot of the engineering work that we've done so thirdparties can accelerate the process. We also chose to use USB so that other people can do cool stuff like arcade sticks"



The back of the console features the ethernet connection that will facilitate multiplayer gaming both over LAN and Internet, as well as a fairly sizeable cooling fan and AV out

Having announced that *Colin McRae 2x* is to join the XBox stable, Microsoft was keen to emphasise that the game will be fully kitted out with features exclusive to the platform, but the fact remains that the company has yet to reveal an exclusive title which is truly inspiring, particularly given that the *Oddworld* demo was less than stellar, featuring slowdown in places











"XBox's amazing performance has liberated our game designers, allowing them to elevate Argonaut's games and visuals to a level not seen before on any other console"

Microsoft's voiceover technology, as Allard explained: "With 12Mbits all the way to the controller, one thought we have which is pretty clear is a headphone/microphone piece." There isn't yet an official announcement regarding a voice peripheral, but the possibilities should such a product appear are not restricted to multiplayer gaming, but also raise the potential of voice recognition. Another possible add-on that Allard mentioned is a camera that can be plugged in to the controller: "Imagine capturing your face and having your expression on the screen and integrated with the game experience." While both of these may take a while to arrive – although Microsoft has already released a voice peripheral for PC – a DVD remote control peripheral is likely to appear sooner. Staying true to the 'all about games' message, DVD playback of movies will not be supported out of the box. Instead, Microsoft and thirdparties will be manufacturing a controller that will include an infrared receiver to plug into one of the controller ports.

XBox games

After whetting appetites with talk of peripherals, Allard turned his attention to the real meat of the presentation: demos of *Malice* and *Oddworld*. Despite bandying about a 20 per cent figure for the approximate performance of the dev kits on which these were running, it isn't entirely clear where this number comes from, particularly given Allard's slightly disingenuous response when pressed on the matter. "It's just a lot of math and it's a rough approximation. The hard thing is that you can calculate polygons per second fill rate, but there'll be so many cool features, what with the pixel and vertex shaders and things that you can do with the graphics processor, that will offload so much of the CPU cycles that your effective performance has got some multiple that has nothing to do with strict math," he explained. "The point we were trying to make is that you can see this world on the screen and it's on a subset of what the final XBox will be." Regardless, Argonaut's *Malice* looked extraordinary, particularly compared with the video files that quickly proliferated on the Internet, which simply don't do the demo justice. "XBox's amazing performance has liberated our game designers," points out Argonaut's **Jez San**, "allowing them to elevate Argonaut's games and visuals to a level not seen before on any other console." Featuring a comedic interpretation of the 'girl and robot' theme of previous XBox demos, it boasted extravagant lighting effects and some impressive textures. The most arresting aspect, though, was the use of bumpmapping effects to give a greater sense of depth to textures. "With bumpmapping we're not wasting polys," commented Allard, "and the great thing about not wasting polys is that you can use the memory for more textures, more geometry in other places, for doing things like GeoMod, rather than simply making a scene look believable." But this made it all the more puzzling that *Oddworld* was shown after *Malice*. No doubt Microsoft is pleased to have stolen it from under the nose of Sony, but it looked disappointing next to the sophistication of the Argonaut presentation, largely because of the flat and uninspiring textures – as well as some frame rate issues that were unforgiveable given the point of the exercise. But the most dispiriting aspect of the demos is that neither demonstrated any new paradigm in gameplay design. With each falling fairly squarely into the platform category, it isn't clear exactly how they will utilise the hard drive, or incorporate any of the interesting ideas that Allard talked about the last time he spoke to **Edge**.

Perhaps a clearer indication of the power of XBox to usher in new principles of game design will come with the Tokyo Game Show at the end of March. Allard points out that about a third of the



Allard claims to have used the XBox controller for six hours straight – despite its stiff trigger action



The overall reaction to the console has bee favourable, with negative feedback confine to controller design, but what really matters of course, is what's inside the box. Microso is confident, though, that it has got this righ

developers who have signed up for the XBox are from Japan: "As you can imagine, a bunch of the Japanese content is really innovative stuff. There will be a ton of announcements at the Tokyo Game Show." However, a report in the *Nikkei Industrial Daily*, suggesting that Japanese software companies are waiting to see how Microsoft's XBox is received before committing to titles or shipping dates for products, would suggest otherwise.

XBox launch

It is certainly crucial for the overall success of the platform that Microsoft mounts a successful marketing campaign in Japan, though this is something that Allard doesn't balk at. "It's a huge opportunity for us, but it's also challenging," he points out. "But we know how to market in Japan. When we did the *Windows '95* launch – which will pale in comparison to the XBox launch – we had people buying *Windows '95* who didn't have computers. If we have the right games and a good marketing campaign, we should be successful. And we'll probably do a different controller for Japan. It's not confirmed, but some of the feedback that we've had and the fact that we're aiming for a slightly younger demographic, we're seriously looking at either bundling or having near launch a smaller controller designed for that market." Also significant, and laudable, is that Microsoft will not be dictating territorial lockout codes for games. "It's up to the game publisher to decide whether there will be a territorial lockout, but it's the publisher's prerogative, and not a policy that we hold. As a rule of thumb, particularly with publishers who don't have plans to localise, we'll encourage them to enable it to work in other territories, so that people don't have to chip their systems. It's a shame when they don't want to localise, but it's even more of a shame when someone's trying to get hold of a game that the publisher's not ready to bring it over; do you want to rip open your brand new box and chip it? That's terrible."

But while Japan and the US will receive their XBoxes this year, the European launch has been pushed back until next year. Justifying this decision, Allard states: "Retailers and gamers and the industry itself are pleased that we announced it this far in advance to set expectations, and thought it was unrealistic to consider launching in three territories at once." No doubt **Edge** readers might disagree with this sentiment, though he does go on to reiterate the company's commitment to the territory. "It's a five-year business, and we're in it for the long haul. We're looking at guaranteeing a successful launch with sufficient quality of content with sufficient quantity of hardware, and the best way to do that is to launch in US and Japan, then Europe in a three or four month window." Indeed, he is keen to stress that the company takes the availability of not only the base unit, but also sufficient peripherals, very seriously, having

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2x is set to feature a host of features that make use of the XBox's networking capabilities, giving it the edge over previous console versions

"We think that the hard disk and the network are as significant to gaming as 3D was. And we don't have all the answers. Just like we didn't have all the answers about 3D"

Although Microsoft is pleased to have secured *Oddworld*, the demo was a disappointment shown next to *Malice*.



learned from Sony's mistakes with the launch of PlayStation2: "There was certainly an emotion around the PlayStation2 launch, but that was disappointment. And we don't want to disappoint gamers, we don't want to disappoint retailers or our publishing partners. Retailers were bummed that there were low-quality games and there were too many games. Gamers were bummed about the quality, and everybody was bummed about the quantity. So we're going to try to stage the launch in a more successful way, and we're going to be really thoughtful about forecasting the number of units to be shipped by a certain date, because those expectations get set, and if you don't meet those expectations it really gets you off to a bad start and leaves a bad taste in people's mouths. As the new guys in town we can't afford that."

A successful launch, however, is still some way off for Microsoft. Certain questions remain unanswered, and negative press, such as an article on Forbes.com,





don't help. Despite factual inaccuracies, the piece questions Microsoft's ability to ensure the development of the great games that are a prerequisite for longevity in the competitive console market, and is unlikely to go unnoticed by investors. **Edge** is more concerned, though, with Microsoft's failure or refusal to capitalise on the machine's unique selling points at this early stage. As Allard puts it: "The hard disk and the network are the two things that are fundamentally different, but don't underestimate horsepower alone. We think that both the hard disk and the network are as significant to gaming as 3D was. And we don't have all the answers. Just like we didn't have all the answers about 3D." The reluctance to reveal some of the ways in which the hard disk is being used by developers may be part of Microsoft's attempt to manage expectations, but along with the lack of information about the company's plans for broadband networking, it remains a potential area for concern. As Sony has learned, indistinct and nebulous feature sets have the capacity to disappoint when they are made concrete.

Executive stress

Microsoft director ups his cool credentials in an **Edge** interview

Attempting to get answers to some of the inevitable questions raised by the unveiling of XBox at CES, **Edge** spoke to **Seamus Blackley**, director of the XBox Advanced Technology Team. While he was able to shed some light on the company's plans for launch, he wasn't taking the exercise entirely seriously.

What kind of consumer is the console design aimed at and what techniques will be used to market it to specific demographics?

In actuality, we did a tremendous amount of research to determine how best to excite the entire customer base, including hardcore, casual, and first-time gamers. A rigorous program of animal testing and tropical deforestation resulted in what we think is an exciting design that conveys the power and promise of games on XBox, while simultaneously underscoring the perpetual struggle and ultimate despair of being.

Is Microsoft's marketing strategy going to be different in the States to the UK, especially with regard to broadband?

Americans, as you well know, are humourless, and read at only the level of the average British ten-year-old, so we will necessarily use simple words and concepts in our US campaign. We may also, of course, employ the threat of physical violence, and the use of firearms.

In the UK, we will target the consumer by reference to Joyce, Shelley and Chaucer, and inspire national pride through allusion to events such as the battle of Agincourt. Additionally, we will make use of such un-American devices as sarcasm and self effacement. Other differences will of course include the letter 'u' in words such as 'colour' and 'humour,' and 'r' in 'theatre'.

Clearly, however, broadband adoption and technology are quite different in the US and the UK, not to mention Europe and Japan. In Japan, for instance, there is approximately one cable company for every three people, while in the UK, of course, getting online costs between £500-£1,000/second. Thus we will be addressing some quite specific issues on a regional basis, not only with respect to advertising, but also in the rest of the program.

How many games will be ready for launch? How is the company encouraging the development of exclusive titles?

We'll have ten or 15 titles ready to buy at launch, with more coming at a prodigious rate immediately following those. Many of these will be original, many will be exclusive. Some will have appeared first on other platforms, but these will be true conversions and not ports – they will take advantage of the power of XBox to take the game to the next level. We're deadly serious about games taking advantage of the features of XBox, and equally serious about avoiding cheap ports in the process.

If you think about it, XBox almost mandates exclusivity all on its own. When you have the horsepower to do unprecedented things on a specific console, it's hard to port back to the other platforms. *Munch's Oddysee* is a great example of this – a game whose vision can only be realised on XBox is by definition exclusive to XBox. You should also bear in mind that other games that want to compete then have to meet that quality bar, and so on and so forth.

Remember that, at the end of the day, the dream of the XBox team is basically to catalyse a new era of gaming, in which totally new, unforeseen kinds of games are possible. Basically because we want to play them.

What sort of guarantees can Microsoft make with regard to shipping on time and with the sort of number that will ensure no consumers will be left without a console at launch?

I promise. Really.

What influenced the controller design? Did Microsoft look to any of its competitors for guidance?

The main thing that influenced the design of the controller was our experience as gamers and game designers. So, instead of working on it with the goal of winning obscure awards from impossibly elite design magazines, we thought we'd make it comfortable to hold and easy to design games for.

'Look' is not really a big issue with us (although we think the controller looks fabulous), because more important than anything else is that it feel good in the hand, and continue to feel good after hours and hours of play. We actually tested designs on over 5,000 people worldwide, all with the ultimate goal of making a controller that was comfortable and intuitive enough that you forgot it was there. You should spend your time looking at the game, not the controller.

What has Microsoft learned from Sony's PlayStation2 launch?

1. Launching a game console is really hard, even for experienced companies.
2. Always spend more money on production than on promotion.
3. Love your customer, and think of the business from the gamer's perspective – what is it like to be excited about something for months then not get one after standing in line for hours?
4. Prelaunch XBox at $10,000 on Ebay.
5. Launch difficulties produce really funny Sega adverts.

industryopinion

Edge asks the industry for its first impressions of XBox

"I can honestly say that it is the worst controller I've held in a long time. Other than the usual, laughable Sidewinder D-pad, the right analogue stick catches your thumb when you're using the A and X buttons. And both sticks feel too tall. It might ape the GameCube pad's design, but it sure as hell doesn't match it."
Anonymous developer

"I really like the look of the XBox. It is definitely a classic console design. The black exterior with the X motif and the luminous green button are cool, simple, and really make good use of all the branding that Microsoft have been doing so far. Many technohead early adopters like me won't care what it looks like as long as the games rock.

I think the Microsoft strategy on the XBox is working very well. After all, they are regularly making the front page with the XBox. They are gradually building the brand, not revealing too much too soon, aiming to peak at the right time – a good few months away. The XBox has come so far, out of nowhere, and it clearly has a very exciting way to go. Until now Microsoft has only been building up the XBox brand – it is a cool logo for a great console.

It is amazing to think how much attention Microsoft have got for the XBox, and they've not even been trying very hard. Moving back the European launch might be a disappointment for some, but I think most people would prefer not to have to ration consoles or to witness the scramble for machines that happened in France. The key, as always, is the quality of the games."
Chris Kingsley
Rebellion

"As ever, Microsoft's marketing savvy shines through with a product that screams brand awareness from every available space. If the proposed $500m marketing spend had failed to convince you that Microsoft intends to make sure X marks the console of choice, then this surely should. Sure, it looks like a video recorder and the joypad looks like it was born of a Dreamcast, but it could have been a hell of a lot worse. Given the high specs, developer support, marketing muscle, and consumer-friendly design, it only remains for Microsoft to ensure a strong launch line-up, a hurdle that the competition will be praying they stumble on."
Vince Farquharson
Synaptic Soup

"I'm very impressed with the look of the XBox from what I've seen. I think that there are two major concerns remaining: can they manufacture the initial units in time, and will the games be great? I'm confident that, chip supply problems aside, Microsoft have the hardware manufacturing experience that they need. Manufacturing a console (negotiating for parts, just-in-time delivery of those parts, finding manufacturing facilities, etc) is very similar to manufacturing all the hardware that they already make. So I don't think that this will be much of a problem for them.

As far as great games go, Microsoft seems to be lining up a great initial catalogue. I suspect that a lot of the initial games from teams with mostly PC experience won't do as well as hoped. Making games for consoles is subtly different. Mistakes will be made, but there'll be some great games in there, too – definitely enough to establish the XBox as one of the major consoles for the next three to five years."
Andrew Bennett
Crystal Dynamics

"Forget about trying to 'work' your way into the console market, Microsoft is going directly for a headshot on Sony. They are showing their high-calibre bullets one after another (high-end Intel processor, state-of-the-art NVidia processor, *Halo* from Bungie, Lionhead, EA, etc) then loading them into their gun. It's a very serious time for Sony/Nintendo/Sega and they better disarm Microsoft before it ships or they will have an 'X' on their foreheads."
Dave Perry
Shiny Entertainment

"The appearance of the machine is attractive (bar the green jewel stuff), but then again, I wonder whether there's ever been anybody who's decided not to buy a console because they didn't like the look of it. At least Microsoft has created something that won't arouse extreme reactions. Far more important, of course, is the controller, and in that respect Microsoft has done a good job. With the exception of the digital pad (reigning champion: Nintendo), there appear to be no real problems (although I still wouldn't have minded them blatantly copying the PS shape and form). So far, then, Microsoft don't seem to have made any huge mistakes, and the overall strategy still appears sound, both in the way they are approaching and treating developers, and in the publisher support they are gaining. However, good games do not necessarily sell the machines any more, as Sega unfortunately proved, so it will probably come down to the amount of marketing expenditure, and, more importantly, the way it is spent. Is Microsoft perceived as being as 'cool' as Sony? Only time will tell."
Martin de Ronde
Lost Boys Games

"Cosmetically, the console is hardly the most pretty piece of kit ever designed, but with all that power under the bonnet, you can't really complain, can you? The platform's standing in the consumer's eye is interesting even at this early stage. We are already receiving enquiries from our customers as to the machine's availability, with some of our store managers being asked if they need to fill a form in now to guarantee a machine from launch. Now there's a concept."
Doug Bone
HMV

"I'm not a big fan of the joypad – I heard someone comment: "Well, there will never be a decent fighting game on that system" immediately after seeing it. The joypad is more important than most people think. The system is certainly super-powerful, and, as we all keep hearing, MS have got deep pockets. But haven't we heard this before? Remember ECTS in 1995 – remember 'Hot for *Windows*'? There were some in the industry who couldn't understand why the SNES and the Mega Drive were strong. Everything they have shown so far is impressive. They have put together a strong organisation, and all the pieces are in place. All they need now is compelling software. I don't think *Oddworld* or *Malice* are true 'killer apps'. E3 will be the decision-maker. Will they have more big announcements to make? What of the now-fabled Square announcement? I hope they deliver, but to do it they will have to be better than Sony. And that is no mean feat."
Alex Ward
Criterion

"Over the past year, there have been a series of announcements about how wonderful the XBox will be that were probably more aimed at undermining Sony's PS2 launch than anything else. Now that the PS2 has launched and the XBox launch is getting nearer, it seems that the so-called 'specifications' are gradually being scaled down – now there's no DVD capability as standard. To top all of that, it runs *Windows*. Just think – software installation, driver conflicts, scandisk, safe mode, the list goes on. Suddenly the XBox doesn't sound like the best of the next-gen consoles any more."
Steve Ellis
Free Radical Design

Online survivors look to the future

An annus disastrous for Internet businesses seems certain to slow the rush to develop online content, but insiders remain bullish about the prospects of Internet gaming

At the end of a stormy year for any company with a business plan relying on the Internet, SMi's Online Games 2000 conference underlined the obstacles the games industry must overcome before online gaming can becomes a profitable business opportunity. One of the main concerns voiced was the collapse in Web advertising rates. Pessimists predict the cost per thousand rate will dip below $1, something that could sink all but the largest Web sites that rely purely on advertising revenue to survive.

"Venture capital and IPO money does not exist any more. The future is a low-risk, high-revenue game – that's the golden goose"

"Venture capital and IPO money does not exist any more," warned conference chairman **Clement Chambers**, who knows more about the situation than he would probably care for thanks to his day job as senior VP, sales and marketing at On-line. "The future is a low-risk, high-revenue game. That's the golden goose," he predicted, although if any delegates had any ideas on the subject, they were keeping tight-lipped.

As if to underline the general feeling of malaise, conference rumours about the health of Pure Entertainment proved to be at least partly true as the owner of free gaming portal freeloader.com announced that it had made all of its in-house development staff redundant. Freeloader currently relies solely on advertising for its revenue. Bob Dewar, Pure's CEO, admitted the restructuring was in part to reduce Pure's monthly burn rate to ensure the company achieved its breakeven target of 2002, but he added Pure was still adding sales and marketing staff as it continues freeloader.com's international rollout into France, Germany, and the US. At the end of 2000, Pure's share price stood at 18 per cent of its 52-week high.

Another high-profile UK casualty of the collapse of Internet valuations was Gameplay.com. The mail-order, ecommerce, game-hosting-service-turned-game-developer closed its Colchester office, which was home to its online game development team. Its massively multiplayer title *Online Pirates* (working title) remains in development in Vienna. The company's directors also issued a statement prior to Christmas affirming that the company would still be able to become profitable with the cash resources raised from its IPO. At the end of 2000, Gameplay's share price was 12 per cent of its 52-week high.

Calling the future

Considering the slow take-up of WAP services, one surprise of the conference was that the most bullish view of online gaming came from the wireless sector. Both Digital Bridges' business development manager Chris Wright and nGame's CEO **John Brimacombe** possess a robust view for 2001. Partly this is because a solid payment method exists thanks to mobile phone billing systems and content providers' ability to sell server technology to network operators. Digital Bridges' wirelessgames.com is currently hosting 9,000 games a day at peak times and Digital Bridges shares around a quarter of airtime costs with its network partners, Wright explained.

Digital Bridges is also in the process of rolling out Steve Jackson's *Sorcery* WAP game, as well as securing use of the 'Star Trek' licence for a persistent wireless game. Similarly nGame has signed a seven-game deal with Orange. "I believe in the massmarket accessibility of interactive content," said Brimacombe. "We think of nGame as a TV channel." In the US, nGame says it has hosted 325,000 gaming sessions from 125,000 registered users to date.

For much of the online gaming sector, however, the picture is much bleaker. The high cost of developing massively multiplayer persistent games is an obvious issue. Origin Systems' vice president **Gordon Walton** put the initial cost of developing *Ultima Online* at $6m. Supporting the game has since added another $3m to the bill. "It would cost $15m if we started from scratch now," he said. Despite *UO*'s current total of 200,000 registered users, it is still uncertain if the game generates a profit for EA.

There are still start-up companies entering the arena, though. One of these is Small Rockets, which, in a previous

What's the future of online gaming?



Name: Simon Prothero
Company/position: Eidos, technical director
What's the future of online gaming? I think we are going to see an increasing use of broadband, a growth in mobile gaming, and it will be interesting to see what happens with more esoteric platforms such as set-top boxes.



Name: Jonathan Small
Company/position: Small Rockets, MD
What's the future of online gaming? Convergence means divergence: for publishers, they are going to have a rough time. Networks will become publishers and developers will gain strength because they will become publishers, and there aren't so many middlemen. It's a more beautiful future, because games will be more original, there will be more exciting games and they will be cheaper so everyone will win – apart from the middlemen.



Name: Daniel Driechlinger
Company/position: Extant Technologies, in R&D
What's the future of online gaming? I think content is the main issue, and delivering the right content to the user with the right technology is the key. The wonderful thing is that this will mean shifts in the power centres and give better opportunities for other companies. It will also force the existing companies to make their efforts bigger, and eventually the customer will be the person who benefits.



SMI's Online Games 2000 conference was an opportunity to talk about the future, speculate wildly about the next dot.com failure, and trade scooter-riding tips

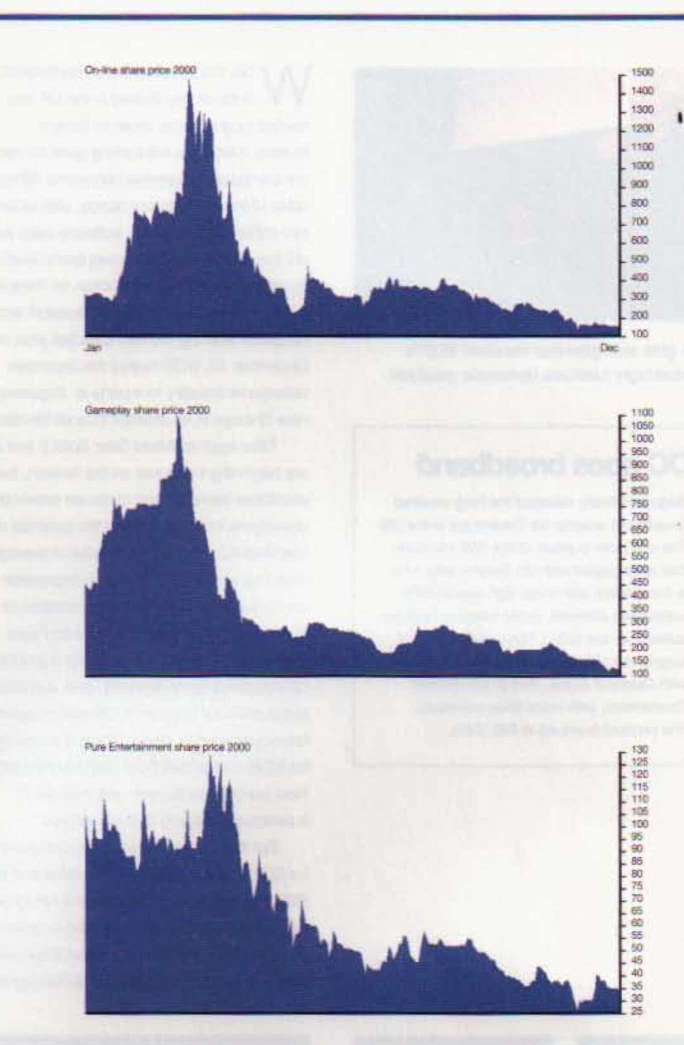
incarnation, was Criterion Studios' internal Fiendish Games operation. Headed up by Fiendish's previous head, **Jonathan Small**, Small Rockets allows gamers to download small (5-15Mb) oneplayer PC games that cost around $15. The current transitional state of online gaming makes this edistribution approach attractive as it doesn't rely on unproven micropayment systems and allows developers to generate new content in months rather than years. "For developers to survive in this online environment, consumers should not expect to receive free content," Small said. Small Rockets has also announced a distribution deal with RealNetworks. Small Rockets' games will now be available on RealNetworks' Web site at game.real.com.

Culture clash

The second day of the conference focused on more traditional games and was illuminated by a friendly face-off between MUD pioneer and now Gameplay's head of online games **Dr Richard Bartle** and HotGen's director of online Steve Cooke.

Bartle's philosophy on community building and his axiom that 'online games don't have to be good, as long as they aren't bad' contrasted with Cooke's own robust approach. Currently developing an online football simulator for Sky, Cooke's view on online gaming is that broadband and online communities both 'suck'. He also advised developers to stick to pre-1995 technology. Another controversial insight into HotGen's design philosophy for profitability has been the attempt to get the smallest amount of users to pay the most amount of money for the privilege rather than the converse. Bartle, on the other hand, sees the current situation for online games as akin to a Wild West land grab, with the winners likely to be those that made it to market first. "Players are not a limited resource. Taking them off someone else is very difficult, so get yours while stocks last," he said, reminding the audience that around 40 massively multiplayer games are in development.

However, no matter which specific sector of online gaming was under discussion, the key to success was recognised to be a company's business plan. Still, 2001 looks likely to be another difficult year for Internet pioneers despite the opportunities presented by connected consoles.





Name: Steve Fowler
Company/position: 3DO, president
What's the future of online gaming? The future of gaming is online is the other way of putting it. Gaming is a very social activity, and the Internet is absolutely the way to support the social activity of gaming. As game designers, we can sit around and try and create the perfect opponent using artificial intelligence, but there is nothing as fun as playing against another human being, and the Internet opens up a whole new world allowing us to do that.



Name: Adam Mayes
Company/position: Digital Bridges, senior designer
What's the future of online gaming? The future is massively multiplayer, mainly offline, high-end community games. There will be realtime engines, but they will be perceived as time-based, so you have persistent worlds that are constantly ticking so the player is always in the game, but a player accesses at various times. GPRS, when you can start pushing the data to the user, will mean that players can be dragged back into the game.



Name: Richard Bartle
Company/position: Gameplay, head of online games
What's the future of online gaming? So far, the online games that have been described here are means of getting small packets of entertainment to people, but there's far more to it than that. Online gaming delivers not small gaming experiences but worlds that you can inhabit because you don't like the real one, because if you make a mistake then nothing really bad has happened, but if you make a mistake in the real world, there's no backspace.



Name: John Brimacombe
Company/position: nGame, CEO
What's the future of online gaming? The existing adult audience will remain a casual audience, but children are so exposed to rich media that they will broaden the hardcore gaming audience significantly.

PS2 faces difficulty at home

Sony makes uncharacteristic slip-ups on home soil, with revamped consoles unable to play games, and peripheral launches slipping



The glitz and glamour masked SCEI's increasingly perilous domestic position

DC goes broadband

Sega has finally released the long-awaited broadband adaptor for Dreamcast in the US. The unit slots in place of the 56K modems that are shipped with US Dreamcasts, and is compatible with most high-speed ISPs, supporting ethernet, cable modem, or direct subscriber line (DSL). The unit doesn't yet support all online games, but it will work with *Quake III Arena*, *Pod 2*, and *Unreal Tournament*, with more titles promised. The product is priced at $60 (£41).

While the appearance of PlayStation2 units on the shelves in the UK has started to give some cheer to Sony in Europe, things are not looking quite so rosy in the company's Japanese homeland. Although sales of the machine are strong, with around two million sold in Japan, software sales are still low, and the company has found itself beset by difficulties just as competition for thirdparty support intensifies, with both Microsoft and Nintendo entering the fray. Late last year, on December 12, SCEI invited the Japanese videogame industry to a party at Jingumae near Shibuya in an attempt to quell the disquiet.

Titles such as *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *ZOE* are beginning to appear on the horizon, but prohibitive development costs are preventing developers from maximising the potential of PlayStation2, resulting in a series of average titles that are failing to make an impression on consumers. Even the demonstration of *Final Fantasy X* at Shueisha's Jump Festa 2000 boasted less-than-impressive graphics during gameplay sequences, and, surprisingly, anticipation for Capcom's *Onimusha* seems to have quietened in Japan. There is some cheer for SCEI in that titles from both Namco and Koei continue to do well, with *Kessen 2* a particularly eagerly awaited release.

But there are more serious inconveniences for SCEI in the shape of new iterations of the PS2 motherboard. While the initial run of units was shipped with a memory card in order to facilitate DVD playback, the latest shipments feature hardware-integrated DVD functionality and include a remote control. The motherboard in these newer machines, which is the third iteration, features one less chip than the previous two versions, in an understandable move to reduce manufacturing costs. This move has backfired, though, as several games do not function on the newer consoles, and to add insult to injury in the eyes of developers, SCEI claims this is because official recommendations concerning game development were not followed. It's even rumoured that *MGS2* has had to be modified to enable it to run.

To compound these problems, the positioning of the device is still confusing consumers and alienating developers. With multimedia peripherals like printers and digital cameras being released at expensive prices, the delayed introduction of the hard drive and modem is beginning to alarm developers working on games enabled for these devices. Square, for example, has had to give up plans to include online features in *Final Fantasy X*.

Given these difficulties, the resurgent popularity of Nintendo among both the public and developers alike, is more bad news for Sony. Titles on both Game Boy Color and N64 did well over the Christmas period, and Game Boy Advance is expected to have a successful launch with more and more top-quality titles being announced. With the imminent launch of GameCube, and to a lesser extent the XBox, it is therefore imperative for Sony to maintain good relationships with the best thirdparty developers, such as Konami, Namco, Koei, Tecmo, Bandai, and Square. Konami, Koei and Bandai, for example, have already announced the conversion of all their games for GameCube, and *Final Fantasy X* will be appearing on XBox. But by the time those consoles are released it should be clear whether SCEI's industry party was sufficient to woo developers back into the fold, or whether it was too little, too late.



In an attempt to head off competition for the affection of thirdparty developers from Microsoft and Nintendo, SCEI invited them to a party near Shibuya to reiterate its support















SCEI announced a revised line-up of PS2 software at the party, including (top row, left to right) *Onimusha*, *Winning Eleven 5*, *Densha de Go! 3*, *Monster Farm 3*, (bottom row, left to right) *Rimokororon*, *Toro No Kyujitsu*, and *Para Para Paradise*. All good news for the increasingly beleaguered company, but there is bad news in the shape of a delay for *Gran Turismo 3*

Milia New Talent is named

Milia announces its pick of the new crop of videogame makers, all of whom will travel to Nice for the Milia 2001 show in February



Winners of the Milia's New Talent Competition will be on their way to Cannes at the start of February to rub shoulders with some 7,000 industry professionals from over 50 countries

On January 11, Milia 2001 announced the winners of its New Talent Competition. The competition is supported by **Edge** and Kamera Interactive, and being organised with the Japanese Association AMD (Association of Media in Digital) and Ngapartji. A jury of six new-media experts met in Paris in December to select 15 winners from a total of just under 100 entries that were received from university students based in 19 different countries around the world, including the US, Japan, Australia, Russia, and across Europe. Winners will attend Milia along with five other students and the course director from their respective university, where they will be given the opportunity to display and demonstrate their work within the New Talent Pavilion.

"Interestingly enough, although from different backgrounds, the jury voted almost unanimously," stated jury president **Andreas Brosjo**, vice president of Kamera Holding. "I was happily surprised by a number of projects that literally went beyond the screen, and into the common world. Visitors to the pavilion will surely get quite a few surprises, especially when concept, technology as well as execution, blends together defining the path of tomorrow." With over 7,000 industry professionals from over 50 countries set to attend the event, winners will also be given a unique opportunity to develop contacts.

Laurine Garaude, executive director of Milia, commented: "The New Talent Competition ties perfectly with Milia's strategy of attracting not only established content developers to Cannes but also the new young raw talent that exists in universities throughout the world. We see it as one of Milia's roles to stimulate communication and understanding between industry and new talent, and believe the New Talent Competition is a perfect vehicle with which to achieve this."

There were three UK winners: Rob White with *Ibis* (London College of Printing, School of Media); Onno Baudouin with *Lemmings* (University of Wales College); and Heddwyn Coombs with *Mini Beasts* (Staffordshire University).

Milia 2001 the World's Interactive Content Marketplace, will take place from February 10-14 at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes. For more information see www.milia.com.

Motorola to target game devcos

Hot on the heels of its successful Application Developers Seminar in October, the phone maker announces plans for a Mobile Game Developers iteration in February

After the success of its Application Developers Seminar in October 2000, Motorola is organising a Mobile Games Developers Seminar, which will take place at the Shaw Park Plaza Hotel,London, on February 5-6.

"This conference is targeted purely at entertainment, and it's the first time that Motorola has done that," says **Juan Montes**, VP of technology for Motorola Europe. "We want to share information and inspire developers so they can go away and start producing content, the best of which will be showcased at Milia and E3."



Juan Montes, VP of Technology for Motorola Europe, will host the conference

Sessions will cover key technologies such as WAP, J2ME, and SMS, but Montes is also keen to cover game design: "We want to talk about the types of experiences that we see as important for mobile games. It's not just a case of taking something that has worked on PlayStation or PC. We're focusing on the creation of a new paradigm for gaming."

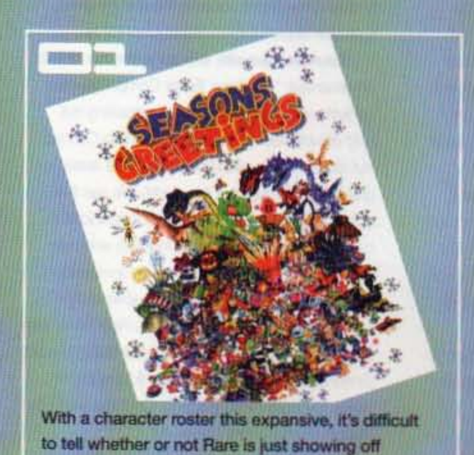
The conference is another mark of Motorola's determination to make mobile gaming a reality, following the company's appearance at ECTS, and its announcement that it will be working with Sega to develop a Java-based API to cater for the needs of development for mobile handsets. Referring to his previous experience with the launch of the PlayStation, Montes sums up: "Creating the community, which I think Sony was pretty successful at, is important, and you need the conferences and the forums and the support infrastructure that enables people to get and discuss information and share experience."

Interested parties can register at www.motorola.com/developers.

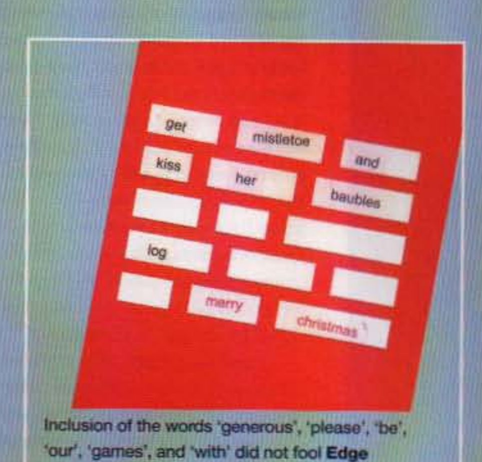


Motorola is keen for developers to work with handsets such as the Accompli Concept

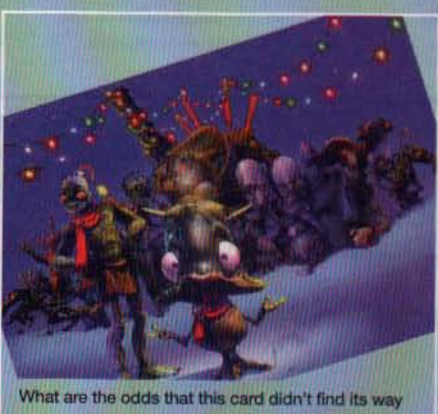
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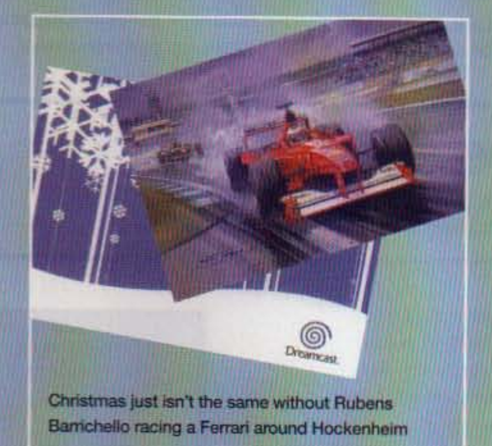
With a character roster this expansive, it's difficult to tell whether or not Rare is just showing off



Inclusion of the words 'generous', 'please', 'be', 'our', 'games', and 'with' did not fool **Edge**



What are the odds that this card didn't find its way to Sony Computer Entertainment's PR department?



Christmas just isn't the same without Rubens Barrichello racing a Ferrari around Hockenheim





Portable PSone gaming is now a reality. A special rumble facility is also available for in-car players

01 Playing cards

UK: Christmas can be an uplifting time, providing weary journos with the odd festive lunch and the opportunity to don silly hats with spend-happy PR executives. Cards, too, were in plentiful supply in 2000 and even the more groanworthy puns ('Happy Hol-ODD-ays' from Oddworld Inhabitants being among the more laboured efforts) were not enough to reduce the cheer. Rare's effort was typically vibrant, with most of the enjoyment coming from trying to spot components from forthcoming games among the throng of colourful characters. But the prize for innovation goes to the ever-resourceful Virgin Interactive with its customisable card, complete with sticky labels and potentially scandalous sentence formations. More surreal entries came from Microprose, with a Ferrari card one member of the **Edge** team swears he received on his 15th birthday, while Sega Europe's dour and frosty minimalist scene perhaps reflected its less-than-glowing performance over the year 2000.

02 PSone finally goes portable

UK: An LCD monitor for PSone is hitting stores right about now. Manufactured by Wild Things, the screen reaches users before Sony's own unit, which is due in March. Though initial shipments will be low (approximately 10,000), the thirdparty peripheral company promises further batches in the following months. The monitor has a four-inch colour display, and comes with stereo speakers, plus an in-car adaptor. It retails at £110.

Soundbytes

'Microsoft will lose money on the hardware like any self-respecting videogame maker… if anyone knows how to carpet-bomb America with underpriced products and recover money later, it's Microsoft'

Forbes.com commenting on the possible pricepoint of XBox

"I'd rather get 15 million dollars, put it on the floor right here, and set it on fire. It'd be easier in the long run"

Origin's **Gordon Walton**, at Online Games 2000, on what he'd do if he were to make *Ultima Online* over again

"The small number of problems we have had indicate difficulties in setting up the machine"

Sony UK PR supremo **David Wilson** commenting on PS2's teething troubles

'We know a lot of our units are not up to consumer standards'

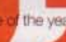
Leaked Sony memo to *The Sun* newspaper

'*007 Racing* reminds you of those 4am journeys to the Stop & Shop, but with more firepower. And no KitKats, Rizlas or pasties'

From *Front* magazine's 5/5 review of EA's latest Bond tie-in

'The PlayStation2 has graphics that border on virtual reality'

The Guardian Unlimited's early entry for 2001's Soundbyte of the year



03 New game platforms emerge

UK: It may be the biggest videogame platform in the world, but marketing executives at Nintendo are surely taking things too literally. Witness a new style of shoe, designed by Helen Richards, in the six hues assigned to the Game Boy Color. The style campaign is Nintendo's continuing effort to have its most profitable piece of hardware perceived not just as entertainment device but also as a fashion accessory. But, at £1,500 a pair, they're unlikely to damage sales of more practical carry cases.

04 Armchair surfers rejoice

US: Armchair maker La-Z-Boy Inc has teamed with Microsoft to release a luxury 'e-cliner' chair. The seat comes in two styles: fabric at $1,050 (£714), and leather at $1,300 (£885). Incorporating the Microsoft WebTV receiver, wireless keyboard, and even a handy drink holder, more slothful American Internet surfers can log on with their laptops in comfort right now.

05 Festa interest Jumps

Japan: Queues for Japanese anime and comic festival Jump Festa reached epic proportions this year. Attracting more than 90,000 visitors in two days the event has now become more popular than the bi-annual Tokyo Game Show. Game companies are now targeting the event to market their wares – this year Nintendo showed off Game Boy Advance (with all-new hues), while SquareSoft presented *Final Fantasy X* for the first time. However, a less-than-stellar demo with poor models and flat textures had many wondering why it was exhibited at all.

06 Hands on with Para Para

Japan: Forget cowboy boots and chaps – this is line dancing, Japanese style. Para Para dancing is becoming so popular that Konami has generously provided gamers with the opportunity to practice their routines courtesy of this innovative PS2 peripheral for *Para Para Paradise* (see p45). Hand movements are detected by floor sensors, and, although price has to be confirmed, the chance of getting YMCA down pat is surely worth any money.

Data Stream

Number of copies *Dragon Quest VII* has sold in Japan to date: **4m**
Number of PC games appearing in the wired.com vapourware top ten: **four**
Game at number three in the same chart: ***Black & White***
Game at number two: ***Duke Nukem Forever***
Number of complaints Sony received from disgruntled PS2 customers on Christmas day: **2,000**
Percentage of men who admitted to spending less time in bed with their partners after buying a PC, according to a Youth Intelligence study: **8%**
AMD and Intel predictions for total PC sales in 2002: **$41bn**
Percentage growth of two-PC homes in the next five years according to Forrester Research: **19%**
Percentage increase of overweight children from years 1984 to 1994 according to King's College London research: **100%**
Factor which was said to influence the increase: **playing videogames**
DigiCube's bestselling console title for the holiday week ending December 24: ***The Bouncer***


The range is limited, so you'll have to get in early before Elton John decides to buy the job lot


As you can see, the entire range is hugely practical. About as practical as a hammer made of jelly, in fact

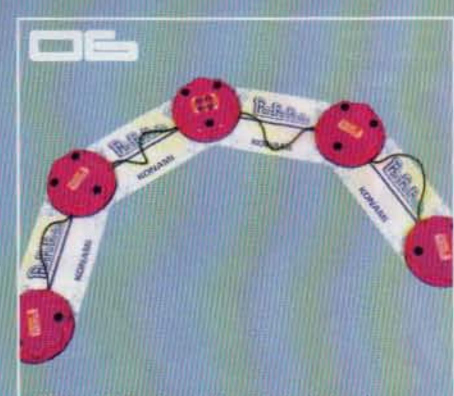

Proof, if any were needed, that obsessive gaming eventually becomes a part of your soul (sorry)


Microsoft's e-cliner chair will allow users to surf the net, watch TV, and mastermind diabolical plots

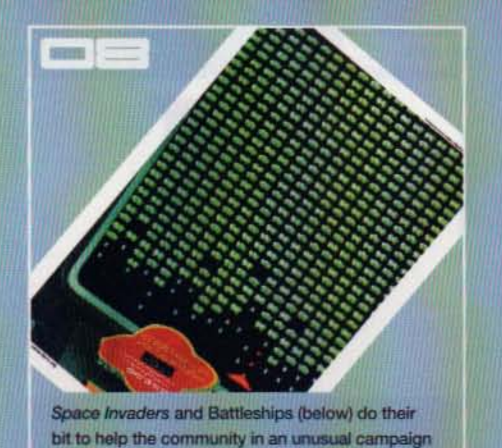

With 90,000 visitors, the festival is now more popular than TGS. And this was just the queue for the toilet


Many attendees were said to be disappointed by Square's first demonstration of *Final Fantasy X*




Michael Flatley fans will have to look elsewhere – *PPP*'s floor sensors pick up hand gestures only





Space Invaders and Battleships (below) do their bit to help the community in an unusual campaign

ATARI 2600 VCS Portable

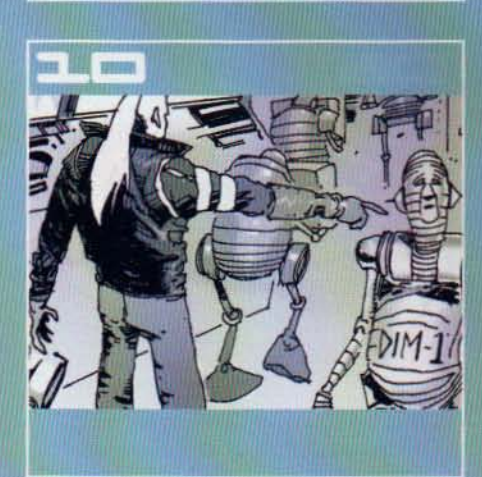
It's a natty piece of kit, but Heckendorn's assertion that the cart acts as a sunscreen doesn't really wash







Creative's PlayWorks PS2000 Digital audio system (lightshow not included with final boxed product)





The Kingsley brothers' management style is clearly having a beneficial effect on *2000AD* employees

07 Atari comes out of retirement

US: It might not be as dinky as a WonderSwan Color, but Benjamin J Heckendorn's Atari VCS 2600 handheld is any retrogamer's dream. A fusion of Radio Shack knobs, moulded acrylic, a nine-volt battery, and a Casio EV-550 portable colour TV, the handheld will play any 2600 game in existence. Only one in the world exists, but Heckendorn generously provides schematics on his Web site (www.classicgaming.com/vcsp/) for anyone who would like to construct their own model – replete with fake wood-veneer finish.

08 Gaming can be good for you

UK: The Samaritans launched an imaginative campaign this Christmas which employed famous board and videogames in an attempt to cut down the suicide rate among 16-24 year olds. The campaign, designed by Ogilvy & Mather, employed the copy line 'you don't have to deal with it all by yourself' followed by the Samaritans telephone number. If videogames take blame for all manner of the world's ills, this is at least some small recompense.

09 Speakers corner

Not that it's jumping on the PlayStation2 bandwagon, but Creative's PlayWorks PS2000 Digital has been developed 'specifically to complement the advanced audio capabilities of PlayStation 2'. Which isn't to say that it's not essentially compatible with any device that has an audio jack. Offering Dolby Digital Surround sound and consisting of a patented dipole speaker, subwoofer and Dolby Digital decoder/amplifier, the device is available for £180 (including VAT and shipping) from the company's Web site (store.europe.creative.com/).

10 Soft folk emerge in pulp print

UK: Rebellion's acquisition of *2000AD* from Egmont Fleetway has clearly made an impact on writers and artists alike. The relationship between comic book outfit and development company is taking on a surreal aspect with the distinction between fantasy and reality blurring at an alarming rate. Editor of *2000AD*, Andy Diggle (better known to his readers as Tharg), is already featuring his new menacing management droid in the comic. Known as King-Slay, the ferocious bot depicts both of software developer Rebellion's chief cheeses, brothers Jason and Chris Kingsley, joined at the hip in a terrifying fusion of authority and strength. Curt-S (Tharg's attack lawyer) and Dig-L (Tharg's droid editor) also appear to make up the team of crack interplanetary journalists. The addition of a whip to King-Slay's armament seems to be no coincidence.



11 The First Quarter

Regular readers of **Edge**'s American sister publication, *Next Generation*, will know the name Steven L Kent through his contributions to the magazine's routinely excellent Retroview columns from a few years ago. The more committed among you will recollect that forever accompanying Kent's byline was the sentence 'author of a forthcoming book about the videogame industry', and wondering when in the name of God the volume would finally be published. Last month saw an exclusive excerpt ('The generation game') printed within these pages, so you should now know two things: a) the book is available via amazon.com; and b) it is a thing of precious value.

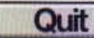
'The First Quarter' title relates to the book's purpose: it recounts the formative 25 years of the videogame industry. And it does so in breathtaking detail, featuring anecdotes from some of the biggest and most influential players who've ever come into contact with this unique form of entertainment. Rather than tying everything up in the same fashion as David Scheff does in the seminal 'Game Over', however, Kent's account is just that: an account – a vehicle with which fact is imparted rather than really mulled over. The danger here, of course, is that videogaming's excessively messy history could have been painted in an awkward light, but Kent's supremely exhaustive research ensures that nuggets of insight into what went on behind the scenes, irrespective of their value in terms of how the medium moved forward because of their existence, leap from nearly every page.

At 466 pages the book is a major work, but perhaps the most stimulating passages concern the industry's early, more innocent years – the reader learns, for example, a great deal more about the original Atari's attitudes towards recreational herbs; about the company's coin-op durability testing ('When engineers wanted to test their designs, they took them to Stubben [a 6' 5", 19.5-stone Atari game designer]. Few games ever survived. One man bragged that he had created an impregnable coin-op door. Stubben smashed it in with one kick of his cowboy boot. He bent one joystick in half and ripped another controller right out of a cabinet'); and the reluctance of *Battlezone* creator **Ed Rotberg** to create a military version because he simply "didn't want to train people to kill."

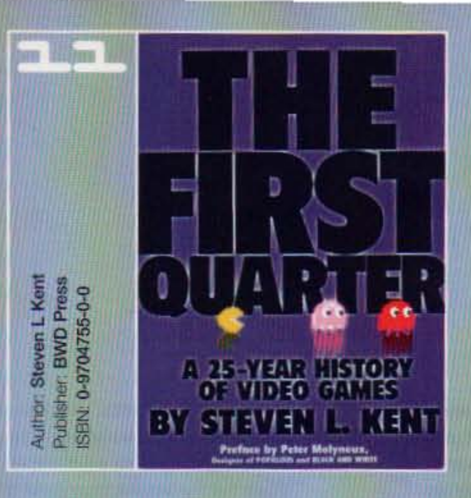
Read this book now or be a forever-unenlightened gamehead.

Continue

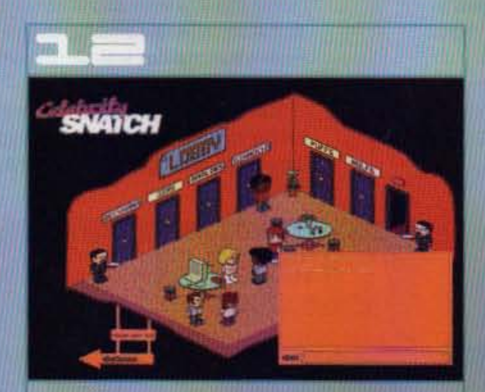
'The First Quarter'
No, **Edge** isn't getting kickbacks for recommending this. Get it
XBox's nine-feet-long controller cords
Hey, they seemed to rock the Net community's world
Edge-Online's forum activity
Proving that not all online posters are imbecilic freaks



The rise of game commentary in the mainstream press
Still, at least it provides plenty of Soundbytes content every month
Wrestlers and the future of e-entertainment
Will Microsoft wheel out Kendo Nagasaki for the UK XBox launch?
Microsoft's American PR machine
XBox pics leak on the Net before official unveiling: you have to worry



Author: **Steven L Kent**
Publisher: **BWD Press**
ISBN: **0-9704755-0-0**



Site: **Celebrity Snatch**
URL: **www.e4.com**

12 Web site of the month

Developed by Empty Space and licensed to E4.com Celebrity Snatch is a novel hybrid of Tamagotchi and Big Brother. Players will have the opportunity to design a character who can then enter virtual parties hosted by B-list celebrities, such as Wolf and Charlie Dimmock. Those who survive the ordeal and prove themselves in a pop-culture quiz will be given a celebrity Tamagotchi for a week. Expert players who can keep the likes of Rolf Harris and Madonna happy for a full week (with Kangaroos and anti-wrinkle cream, respectively) will be given an invite to a real celebrity bash. The game begins at the end of January and can be found at www.E4.com.



13 Advertainment

UK: With his reputation for cinematic weirdness, David Lynch was the obvious choice to make Sony's 'Third Place' ad campaign real. Or surreal, depending on your point of view.

01 Close-up of confused-looking individual surrounded by vents exhaling smoke and fire 02 The siren-like audio gives way to a throbbing hum. Loudhailer: "Where... we..." 03 Head floats down corridor 04 Arm starts to grow out of individual's throat... 05 ... before departing down the corridor 06 At the end of the corridor sits an assembly of unusual individuals 07 Duck-headed man in suit (voiced by David Lynch): "Welcome to the Third Place"



REDEYE

Commentary from inside the videogame industry

Online gaming: be nice to one another

Oliver Stone once came up with a fairly striking visual metaphor. With their platoon cut down by a Viet Cong ambush and retreating in disarray, Sergeants Elias and Barnes cross paths in the depths of the jungle. There is a yawning silence as Elias grins, reassured by the presence of his comrade, before lowering his rifle. Barnes, however, does not. As his rival falls to the ground, he stalks off to join his men. The scene is, of course, taken from 'Platoon', where this beautifully crafted set piece is used to emphasise the moral repugnance and social maladjustment of Barnes after he has been subjected to the cruel realities of an ethically dubious war. Although they don't have quite the artistic vision to pull it off in such an aesthetically visceral manner, there are countless PC owners across the world attempting to enact a similar scene on a fairly regular basis on a *Counterstrike* server near you.

Despite the tardiness with which Sega managed to get it up and running, online gaming as experienced on Dreamcast is far superior to the minefield that new PC owners have to negotiate to be able to get their fix. Not just because solid-state hardware architecture and the pick-up-and-play console ethic make the technical process run more smoothly, but because so far it hasn't been contaminated by the sort of social misfits who make life a bit more difficult for PC users. If you're not a veteran member of an established *Counterstrike* clan, trying to achieve the harmonious teamplay that characterises the title is not easy. Not when your teammate makes like Sergeant Barnes and stymies your chances of making it out alive because he doesn't want you on his team. Or because he finds it funny to ruin other people's fun by shooting innocents. Doing a quick search on the Internet reveals that American intellectual Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "War brings men into such swift and close collision in critical moments that man measures man." Of course, *Counterstrike* is just a game, but the message is clear. Anybody attempting to log on for a quick fix will be in no doubt that the broadband utopia of online gaming for all, featuring innovative genres and incorporating a greater degree of communicative gameplay, is some way off. Instead of using the unprecedented end-user advantages offered by the Internet to establish principles of civility and integration, online communities are content to perpetuate adolescent, combative, socially alienated traits that are always going to deter the average citizen from joining in. Getting shot by a teammate, or having to play against someone who is using a cheat code to improve their chances, is simply not worth the effort for the majority of gamers.

However, it is interesting to ponder what the Internet might be like if these individuals had grown up on a steady diet of games that had been forged in the searing crucible of console development. Is the damning lack of manners that currently proliferates on the Net a result of years of frustration from playing games that require days spent downloading patches, only to reveal a product that still feels slightly unfinished? There are undoubtedly exceptions that prove the rule, but on the whole the production values and sheer comprehension of that most important feature of any game – how fun it is to play – are simply higher in the console sector than has been the case in the PC camp for too long now.

Online gaming as experienced on Dreamcast is far superior to the minefield that new PC owners have to negotiate to get their fix

Just a quick glance at the fare that PC gamers had to put up with over the past few months is hardly inspiring. Titles like *Hitman*, *Escape From Monkey Island*, *American McGee's Alice*, *Project IGI*, and the latest instalment of the *Delta Warrior* series all suffer from not being very good. Granted, they all boast some fairly appealing ideas, and several are clearly attempting to defy the constraints of existing genres, but without fail they are let down by a sloppy finish, and lazy and unintuitive controls. Even firstperson shooters – traditional PC territory – have been done better on consoles in the shape of *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*.

With the unveiling of XBox at CES, it is therefore worth asking whether the network connectivity of next-generation consoles will usher in a new era for Internet sociability, or whether the morons will move in. Since the title's release in Japan, playing *Phantasy Star Online* has been a joy – largely because of the congenial hand of friendship that Japanese players have extended to the small number of western gamers who have had the dedication to play it over Japanese servers. It will be interesting to see if the purity of this experience remains intact when it is released over here, or if the *Counterstrike* brigade will bring its polluting lack of social skills to the party. RedEye certainly hopes that the inspirational design of *Phantasy Star* will hinder the kind of antisocial behaviour that currently characterises online gaming, but this too begs a question: with XBox making it ever easier to port PC titles to people's living rooms, will sloppy design make its presence increasingly felt? If so, will this ruin the social development of the future generation of online gamers, perpetuating a horrible cycle of rejection and alienation? Or will we all be saved by the likes of *Phantasy Star* and *Planet Ring*, which together will mark the arrival of a utopian future for online communities?

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge***'s*

One of the intriguing aesthetic stories of the PlayStation2 launch has been how the world's biggest videogame developer failed to 'do' snow as well as the nearly three-year-old *1080° Snowboarding*, despite having a machine many times more powerful to play with.

EA's *SSX* is a snowbound game almost by default: you're hurtling down mountains on a white course, so you guess it must be snow. But *SSX* is far closer to *Trickstyle*, arbitrarily relocated to a bunch of icy peaks. The soft thump as you land on deep drifts, the puffs of powder billowing up behind your boarder, the sensation of actually cutting through crystals of frozen water – these are all done so much better in Nintendo's classic. (That same Nintendo studio, of course, also designed the seminal *Wave Race*, whose representation of water has rarely, if ever, been equalled.)

Earth, snow, trees, grass – let's call this category of phenomena by the technical term 'natural stuff'. One approach to representing natural stuff in a videogame is a brute-force computational method. At last year's ECTS, for instance, one graphics-card company was demonstrating its latest chipset with a field of grass swaying in the wind, each blade polygonally modelled.

You could then discuss polygons versus voxels (the natural stuff in *Outcast* is particularly well rendered). But even if you don't worry how much processing power the raw computational approach is going to leave for gameplay, it's clear it has to stop somewhere on a domestic system. Climatologists routinely use supercomputers to simulate patterns of snowdrifts and the behaviour of avalanches, with variables that include 3D vectors of wind velocity at every square centimetre over the snowy area, as well as the effects of directional sunlight. Even they stop short of computing the purportedly unique crystalline structure of each snowflake.

Clearly, nothing like this amount of simulation is going on in *1080°*, but the way we perceive natural stuff in real life is only partly visual: up to four other senses can come into play. Hearing is obviously important, but the difference between *SSX* and *1080°* is negligible in terms of audio. For the moment we cannot smell, taste, or actually touch natural stuff in a videogame, although sensory feedback must surely soon move on from the basic two-speed vibration of a Dual Shock pad. Even so, we can, on occasion, be fooled into a visceral appreciation of the qualities of natural stuff without direct sensory feedback. Hideo Kojima, for instance, has said that he wants the player actually to feel cold at some points in *Metal Gear Solid 2*. Certainly the freezer room in the first game, with Snake's breath condensing, left a chilly place in my memory.

But the crucial thing is the modelling of how natural stuff behaves: how it interacts with the player in the gameworld. We have an idea of what snow is like, for instance, not just because we've seen it in real life but because we've played with it, packed it into balls and thrown it at people, or skied on it. We have an intuitive understanding of the material nature of snow.

It's that intuitive understanding that a well-designed game will exploit. *1080°*, unlike *SSX*, puts the player's control precisely where it matters: at the interface between board and snow. The deft analogue control of the board's angle, combined with visual and aural feedback, enables players to really feel that they are skimming the top of deep powder, or blading sideways across the ice on the very edge of her board. They are able to alter their control of the board according to the behaviour of the type of snow underneath, and so the snow becomes part of the game, rather than a mere decorative background. That's why, although *SSX* has better particle effects and textures, it's *1080°* that feels more real. Similar considerations apply for driving games: a sand or gravel pit at the side of the road may be a ropy, low-res texture, but it's the change of your car's behaviour when it leaves the road that convinces you of what's under your tyres.

When natural stuff fails to exhibit the behaviour we expect of it, gameplay always suffers. A species of what I have called 'functional incoherence', for example, arises in the *Tomb Raider* series when a rotting old wooden door just can't be blown up by a rocket-launcher. We know that in real life bits of dead tree are no defence against explosive projectiles, and so the disparity between the door's visual appearance and its function in the game deprives us of a deeper sensory involvement with the gameworld. The sand of desert levels, meanwhile, does not hinder Lara's movement one jot: it might as well be a wooden or a concrete floor painted yellow. By contrast, natural stuff in *Zelda 64* exhibits a reassuring consistency of behaviour. The hookshot will bounce off stone, but sinks satisfyingly into wood; and you can be sure that a wooden Deku Stick will always be lit by a nearby torch.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Reality: modelling realworld phenomena

In a videogame, then, seeing is not everything. In particular, we should recognise that natural stuff does not have to be photorealistic – a purposeful artistic stylisation is often more interesting than an accurate representation of the real thing. This can be seen by the fields of bleached white grass in the paintings of Edward Hopper, for example, which don't look exactly like real vegetation but manage to 'say' grass to the viewer with far more grace and understanding than a photograph ever could. But the videogame designer has the extra job, not given to the painter, of deciding how his grass is going to operate: how it will feel when we run across it, canter through it on a horse, or just idly roll in it. This is a challenge, to be sure, but it is also a great aesthetic opportunity.

In a videogame seeing is not everything. In particular we should recognise that natural stuff does not have to be photorealistic

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

AV OUT





Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Return to the source: putting the fun back in to gaming

First, may I wish you all a Happy New Year. So, how was 2000 for everybody in the game industry? Personally, 2000 was... well... maybe the less said the better. Currently, there is a form of global recession in the industry. I think everybody already knows that 2001 isn't going to provide much good news in the short term.

There isn't much to say about the situation as it stands, so let's put the past to one side – I don't think it's worth picking over the bones of 2000. Let's make a change and start 2001 with a more positive view about the industry.

First, let's talk about an interesting game. Yes, recently we had... er... no, I can't think of one. The only title that springs to mind from last year is *Mario Tennis*. The end of last year wasn't rich in top titles. People spent more time talking about hardware due to arrive in 2001 or 2002, such as GameCube and XBox, than about games, which in itself serves to underline the fact that the present market situation is quite difficult. If I was to discuss the final few months of 2000 for me, I would talk about *Phantasy Star Online* and *Daytona USA 2001*. People worked hard on both games, especially on *Phantasy Star Online*. While neither title has been the smash hit we hoped for, they did quite well and have been welcomed by gamers. The two genres are totally different, but both are based on network use, and, overall, they were quality products. As I worked on *Daytona USA 2001*, I'm quite proud of the game.

However, I have to admit that I don't play a lot of my own games when I'm at home. I tend to play other people's, and as very few games have been released by Nintendo or SCEI of late, I felt a little divorced from gaming over the past year, which is quite sad. Sorry, there I go again, talking about the past. But to return to my game of last year, I played a lot of *Mario Tennis*. And when I say a lot, I mean it.

However, to be honest with you there was a reason for this beyond any analysis of the game's merits. The reason is actually a hint for me in creating new games. So, what is it? Well, it is so simple and so childish that I feel a little ashamed about telling anyone for fear that they'll laugh at me, but the reason is that for the first time my wife has got involved in playing a game. Yes, that's all.

Normally my wife doesn't play videogames at all. She doesn't even know anything about *Super Mario* or *Dragon Quest*. As a rule, she doesn't like videogames. When we talk at home, videogames are virtually a banned topic. So, when my wife, seeing me playing *Mario Tennis*, decided to join me, I was very surprised. The next thing I knew I had to go and buy a second controller so we could indulge in twoplayer matches. After playing for a long time, I finally asked her why she suddenly decided to play a videogame, and she just said: "It looks fun." I was really pleased, and even though Nintendo made the game, I felt as happy as if I had made *Mario Tennis* myself. You may ask why, and I would say that my reasons for feeling like that are because a person who normally doesn't like games found the fundamental elements of a game fun. This came as something of a revelation to me.

It then occured to me that I hadn't felt like that about a videogame-related topic for some time. I feel a little ashamed about that, but I think I was so depressed by the sluggish industry climate that I spent most of my time criticising. I nearly forgot my objective, my motivation: to make people happy through my creations. To think that it was my wife's reaction to a videogame that brought me to realise that... I would never have thought that would happen, so I must thank her.

Anyway, for that reason *Mario Tennis* ranks as my top game of 2000. As a videogame creator, it made me focus on the essentials again, and I really want to make a game with similar attributes. I think there is still a lot to do in this industry, taking into account the reality of the current market. People may say it's impossible to reverse the current move away from videogames, but I would argue that it can be done. I know it would be difficult, but I think people can be brought back to gaming. Game makers still have the will and the ability to do great things. While I still think the situation won't improve anytime soon, if we stick to a few fundamental rules of making games there is a way to turn the situation to the good. I think there are two ways to live your life: a 'happy' one and a 'sad' one. As we only live once, I presume that the majority of people would prefer the former. One way to trigger this happiness is through entertainment, and my dream is to make people's lives more enjoyable through my creations. I know that may sound pretentious, but I mean it.

The 20th century introduced mass entertainment to the world, and videogames are the most recent form of mass entertainment to appear.

The challenge now is how to develop videogames in order to keep people's attention. This is an important issue in my company

The challenge now is how to develop videogames in order to keep people's attention. This is an important issue in my company, and one we are devoting a lot of time to. I want my children to say "This is fun" about one of my games one day, and to make this happen I'm working hard. Next month, I will talk about how the videogame market is evolving.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Edge's most wanted

ZOE

Fast-flowing anime action is sufficient reason to get excited about *ZOE*, although there's also the added incentive of a playable demo of *Metal Gear Solid 2*.



(PS2) Konami

Onimusha

Here's hoping the delays Capcom's medieval slash 'em up incurred were the result of the developer's wish to improve the game's questionable E3 status.



(PS2) Capcom

Outtrigger

Sega is again proving that the DC is the must-have format at the moment, with an arcade conversion of the game which turned the Japanese on to the FPS.



(DC) Sega

Planet Harrier

Shenmue's inclusion of the original *Space Harrier* has only heightened **Edge**'s anticipation of Nagoshi-san's forthcoming incarnation of the arcade franchise.



(Coin-op) Sega

The big bang theory

Or: the power of the opening shot

As the world of videogame production moves closer to that of movie manufacture in terms of team size, funding, plus innumerable other, more creative issues, it's intriguing to note that one of the latter's most firmly established protocols has not been integrated into the former on a more blanket scale.

Simply put, most videogames do not have the beginning-middle-end structure that so typifies the outpourings of Hollywood film studios. Watch any prime-era Arnie outing and you'll note that a major incident rocks the screen within but a few minutes of the credits rolling. The James Bond series offers up perhaps better evidence of this methodology: your initial viewing time is wholly unhindered by mention of Cubby Broccoli or Ian Fleming: 007 has to first leap from a plane, evade enemy fire on a ski slope, or catch a bullet in his underpants before the procession of silhouetted, naked women are allowed to drip across the screen to the accompanying info relating that Shirley Bassey is responsible for the vocals behind the sweeping theme.

True, many games now make at least a gesture towards opening with a bang, usually with a preordained sequence delivered via FMV or, more commonly nowadays, non-interactive action generated by the in-game engine, but few do so in the fashion that apes the movie motif – the one that makes you sit up in your seat and beg to witness a spectacle pan out before you. In this regard, the development of videogame technology is a double-edge sword: while hardware manufacturers continue to give gamers ever-more-complicated (and, crucially, elaborately functional) control devices, game developers must be mindful of easing players into the functionality of a new character in a new gameworld. In worrying about whether gamers will get their heads around whether X will make Johnny Generic Platform Game Hero jump or fire, developers commonly make the first level of a game a 'training' level. And if there's one place you're guaranteed not to get a bang (so to speak), it's a training level.

The aged SNES classic *Super Metroid* (below) must be held up as a benchmark for all developers looking to bring movie-style appeal to a gaming audience thirsty for just that dynamic. The game opens in subtle fashion, with minimalist audio and stark visuals. Leaving your spacecraft, you venture beneath the planet's surface. What transpires next, even in limited 2D SNES-O-Vision, is as movie-like as videogaming gets. Samus, **Edge** awaits your return.

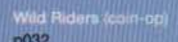












Wild Riders

First it was tagging the streets while on rollerblades, now Sega is suggesting that you race around the city astride a superbike, intent on avoiding the police



Boasting similar city architecture to *Crazy Taxi*, *Wild Riders* looks set to be equally adrenaline-fuelled

One of only four titles that have been officially announced for Sega's Naomi 2 arcade board, *Wild Riders* was first demonstrated in the form of video footage that, shown alongside the likes of *Club Kart Racing* and *Virtua Striker 3*, wowed showgoers at JAMMA last September. Now set for a worldwide exclusive launch at the ATEI trade show at the end of January, the title is one that continues to excite, looking like it could build upon both the aesthetic innovation of *Jet Set Radio* and the hi-octane gameplay dynamic familiar to many from *Crazy Taxi*.

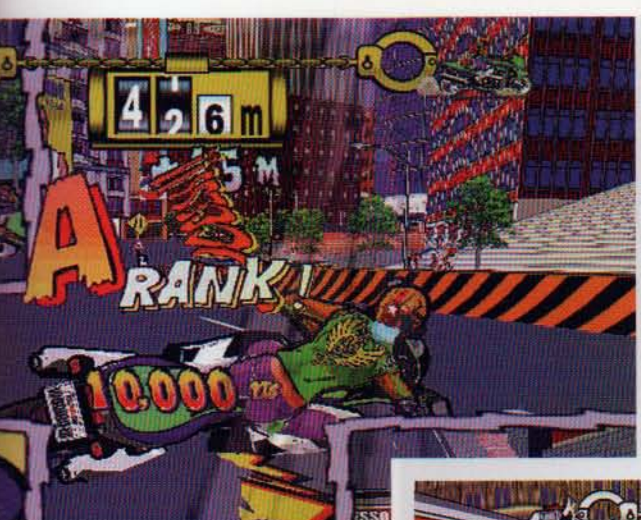
The Naomi 2 architecture should set expectations much higher than was the case with either of those titles, though, seeing as it boasts approximately four times the power of its predecessor and is capable of shifting around ten million polygons. More importantly for Sega, the board is a cost-effective piece of kit, capable of producing the kind of results that were costly and difficult to program on the Hikaru board.

So, although *Wild Riders* bears a superficial visual similarity to *Jet Set Radio* insofar as the way the engine uses polygons but imbues them with the appearance of cel animation – a technique that Wow has dubbed Anime Polygon – the amount of action onscreen is far in excess anything the Dreamcast title offers, and – in all honesty – even the stylistic differences are significant. Where *Jet Set Radio* is characterised by crisp lines and a smooth shading technique – a more traditionally manga style – *Wild Riders* and its rough-around-the-edges style is more akin to a hand-drawn piece of animation from eastern Europe, which is to say appealing in a different way.

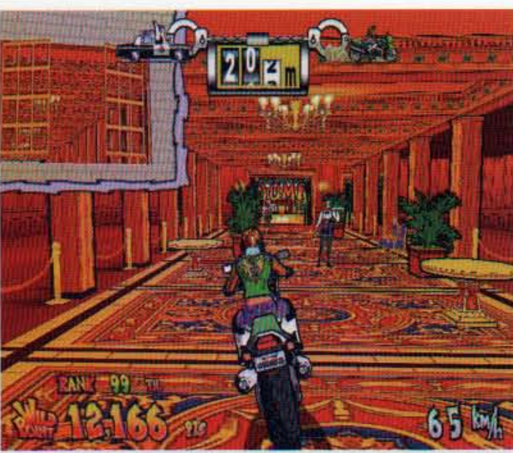
Ostensibly a bike chase game, players are cast in the role of one of four playable characters – each one an ace motorcyclist and gang member. All the participants are on the run from the police, and an onscreen gauge demonstrates the distance between player and pursuer – the object of the game being to maintain this lead. Although the courses do not offer as much freedom as previous Wow title *LA Riders*, players do get a choice of routes throughout the game, and there is more to it than simply racing away from the police.

Players control the onscreen action through the use of a set of handlebars built into the coin-op cabinet. But, in addition to conventional controls, pushing or pulling back on the handlebars enables the onscreen rider to slide or jump in response to onscreen cues, somewhat like *Shenmue*'s QuickTime Events.

Format: **Coin-op**
Manufacturer: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house (Wow Entertainment)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q2 (Japan)**

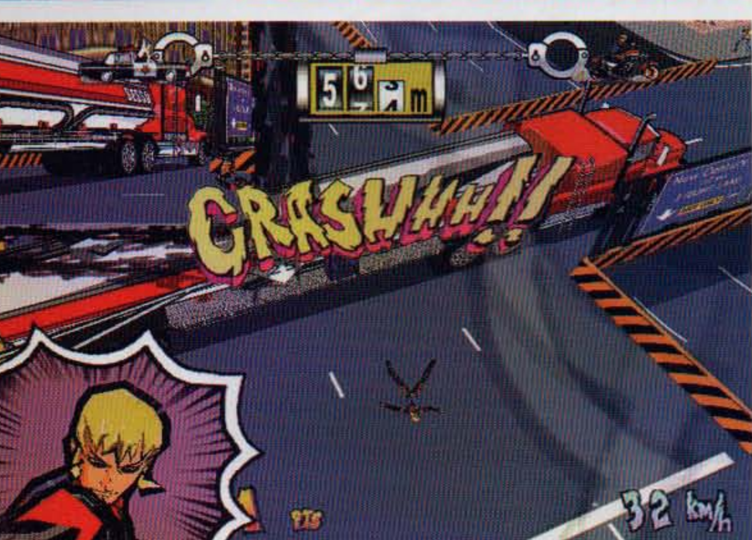


As players perform stunts to evade the pursuing cops, the screen goes haywire, utilising the power of Sega's Naomi 2 to fill the screen with comicbook splashes









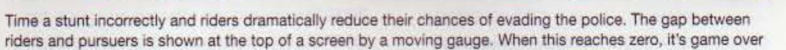
Time a stunt incorrectly and riders dramatically reduce their chances of evading the police. The gap between riders and pursuers is shown at the top of a screen by a moving gauge. When this reaches zero, it's game over



Players who successfully complete the courses – which range across the city and traverse the interiors of certain buildings – are graded on their overall performance. With four characters to choose from and a choice of routes during the chase, there is considerable incentive to rack up high scores

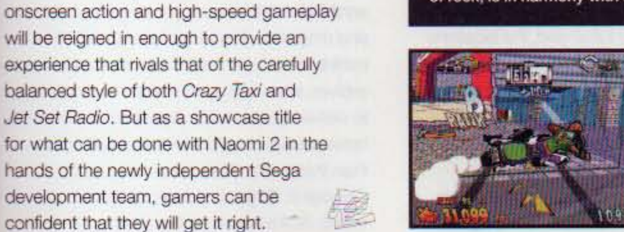
At certain points in the game it is necessary to either slide under obstacles, such as a moving truck, or to jump over obstructions like police blockades or moveable bridges. The successful navigation of these events will further increase the player's distance from the pursuing police forces, while failure to do so will rapidly reduce the chance of evading them. Quite how this will work in practice will have to wait until the game is unveiled in playable form, but video footage from JAMMA suggests that the screen can get pretty crowded. At the end of the game players are awarded a rank denoted, as with *Crazy Taxi*, by a letter, ranging from A to D.

As it stands, the game would appear to possess high-intensity gameplay with a vibrant visual style, but until its official launch it is difficult to say whether the intensity of onscreen action and high-speed gameplay will be reigned in enough to provide an experience that rivals that of the carefully balanced style of both *Crazy Taxi* and *Jet Set Radio*. But as a showcase title for what can be done with Naomi 2 in the hands of the newly independent Sega development team, gamers can be confident that they will get it right.



Wild Riders rock out

The game's two obvious predecessors in terms of gameplay and style – *Jet Set Radio* and *Crazy Taxi* – each feature some fairly distinctive soundtracks. From the poppy punk of the latter to the more hip-hop savvy DJ Kane, each complement their own brand of interactive chic with a correspondingly fashionable audio score. While rock music may not be exceptionally hip on these shores, there is no doubt that the background music in *Wild Riders*, produced internally at Wow Entertainment, rather than featuring any big names from the world of rock, is in harmony with the rough-edged animation and adrenaline-fuelled police chase.







Ace Combat 4

Having spent its first three tours of duty on PSone hardware, Namco's air combat franchise realigns its sights on the 128bit generation



Although the ground may look particularly three dimensional from this height (left), swooping in for a closer look reveals a lot of textures doing their best polygon impersonation – still, the effect works fairly well. Unlike previous *AC* games, this time real planes have been licensed from their respective manufacturers, such as the prodigious F-22 (above)

While not quite *Ridge Racer* in the air, for several years the *Ace Combat* series has been a mildly diverting exercise, providing an enjoyable respite for those prepared to leave terra firma and venture instead into the liberating environment that is the sky for short periods of play. Time has always been the series' most formidable foe – an hour or two into the game and things generally tend to feel a little shallow.

Despite appearing at a pre-Christmas announcement last December in semi-playable form, the game is still at an early development stage, but already certain elements are clearly discernible. The game appears to be designed to be more realistic, and, for once, this is reflected in the use of licensed aircraft – so far the Rafale and Mirage 2000 French duo are airborne alongside the US F-22, but more are on their way, including Russia's agile MIG-21. While the texture quality is good, it's the increase in background object density that is the most apparent alteration, with stages displaying plenty of 3D items to avoid. Fly closer to the ground, however, and flat textures simulating relief become all too evident. Lack of antialiasing results in imperfections on the aircraft framework becoming visible, but at least anything explosion-related is well recreated.

The game appears to be designed to be more realistic, and, for once, this is reflected in the use of licensed aircraft

If the machinery if licensed, the locations certainly aren't – as with previous *AC* games, the land at the heart of the conflict is fictional. This time, Namco's visionaries bring you Yusia, a world where two main factions are currently locked in combat rather than worrying about the interstellar catastrophe that has resulted in the planet suffering devastating meteor showers.

Presumably in an attempt to better integrate *AC* veterans, the cockpit and interface layout offered here are extremely similar to those found in previous instalments, leading most people to view this as a mere cosmetic makeover. Yet there are genuine additions. On top of the regular cannon and missile setup, for instance, you now have the opportunity to launch bombs on unsuspecting enemies. This obviously carries mission-diversifying implications, which is further helped by the revelation that total opponent annihilation isn't always your objective. Tanks and other aircraft may be fighting individual battles around you, but the main scenario evolves according to your actions, promising to deliver a tailor-made experience for anyone brave enough to grab the control stick. But then that's what Namco said about *Ace Combat 3*. **Edge** therefore cautiously awaits *AC4*'s landing in the shops.

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q3**















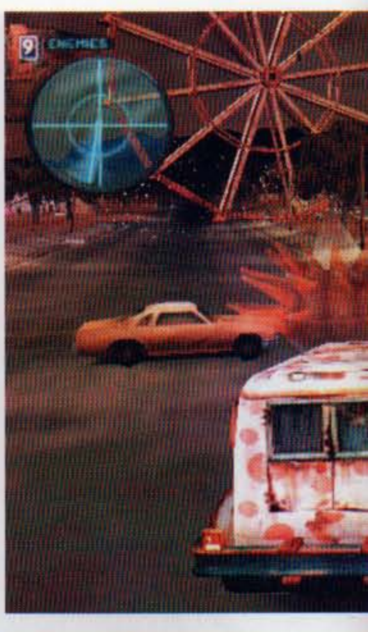


Although Namco has yet to reveal significant plot or gameplay details, rather than require you to destroy everything that may pop up on your sights, certain missions may require a more delicate and strategic approach, an assumption that is in part contrary to the developer's decision to increase the aircraft's destructive capabilities by including bombs, fourth time around. Expect tanks to pop up, too

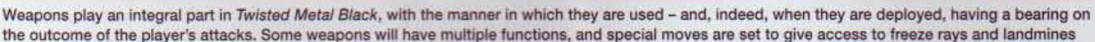
Twisted Metal Black

From the *Interstate* brand to the infamous Stainless franchise, the popularity of vehicular combat games has waned in recent years. Incognito proposes a renaissance









Weapons play an integral part in *Twisted Metal Black*, with the manner in which they are used – and, indeed, when they are deployed, having a bearing on the outcome of the player's attacks. Some weapons will have multiple functions, and special moves are set to give access to freeze rays and landmines



Twisted Metal Black runs at a smooth 60fps in the oneplayer mode, but multiplayer is currently slated for a 30fps refresh rate – Incognito blames PS2

Never a resounding success in Europe, the *Twisted Metal* franchise has enjoyed a remarkable degree of recognition in America. From its inaugural instalment to its fourth airing, the series has sold a figure just shy of five million units in total. Understandably, US gamers with a penchant for vehicular combat are excited at the prospect of a PS2 debut. Although it's far from certain that UK-based press and punters alike will do more than pay it lip service, this fifth outing may be the title to break the trend.

With a staff that includes former *Twisted Metal* team members, Incognito Entertainment is proposing more than a simple update of previous releases. Trading its former eccentricities for a more 'adult' approach, *Twisted Metal Black* is the darker, more gritty remix that its suffix suggests. "We've basically taken the *Twisted Metal* universe and done our best to imagine it through the eyes of a serial killer," says SCEA lead designer **David Jaffe**. That may sound a little hyperbolic to some, and downright hilarious to others, but *Twisted Metal Black* is definitely a more distinctly violent experience than its cartoonish forebears. "It's a much more hostile and disturbing environment – we're trying to incorporate that in everything we do," explains Incognito Entertainment president **Scott Campbell**. "It's not to say that some hilarious things can't happen, but it's all done in an environment where it always feels like there's something brewing – there's something wicked that's going to happen."

Trading its former eccentricities for a more 'adult' approach, *Twisted Metal Black* is the darker, more gritty remix that its suffix suggests

Each of the 13 arenas in *Twisted Metal Black* – ranging from downtown suburbia to a junkyard – possess a suitably dystopian appearance and feel. "We really avoided the wacky, over-the-top locations of *Twisited Metal* and *TM2*," says Jaffe. "We've really put more focus on real locations that are very sad, depressing, and sort of threatening." Each themed area will be populated with suitably indigenous citizens and, in the words of an Incognito team member, players will "be able to interact with them in the way you would want to." A 'mature' rating in the US and possibly BBFC certification in the UK appears to be a given, then.

"Our focus has always been to redefine and reconnect with players on the whole concept of a fighting game in cars," explains Jaffe. "We want to reward players a lot more for their skill." One example Jaffe offers is that weapons can now inflict different degrees of damage depending on when and how you use them, rather than the traditional 'hit/no hit' damage model used in other car combat games. Additionally, many weapons will have multiple functions, with players awarded the familiar luxury of special moves – like freeze rays and landmines. An energy bar will limit

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Incognito Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Summer 2001 (USA) TBC (UK)**





The 13 arenas through which the player battles in *Twisted Metal Black* have been generated by Incognito in order to muster up a foreboding ambience within the game. Battlegrounds include everything from downtown suburbia to junkyards, but aren't as over the top as in previous iterations of the *Twisted Metal* franchise

the efficacy of certain weapons. "We're putting a lot more control in the player's hands in terms of how he wants to play the game, and then rewarding the player for doing the tougher and more interesting attacks," reveals Jaffe. "Between the pick-up weapons, the special weapons, and the energy weapons, you've got a very deep and robust game."

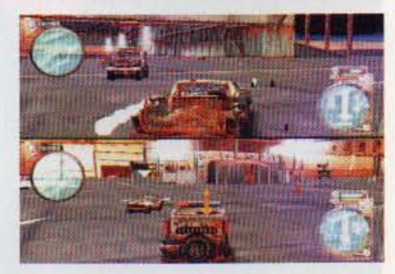
Part of the challenge for Incognito is to create a handling system for vehicles that complements *Black*'s combat. One positive sign, however, is that the team has discarded the much-maligned mechanics of the previous two *Twisted Metal* games. "We've always spent an almost disproportionate amount of time making sure that our car dynamics and controls allowed you to play the game and quickly engage in battle," claims Campbell. Realism, then, is out – *Black*'s cars are responsive and eminently approachable, allowing players to wrestle with their opponents rather than a recalcitrant steering wheel. This is anything but a simulation.

Besides the obvious fillip of enhanced aesthetics, the most discernible improvement this PS2-bound sequel can offer is a super-smooth 60fps update. "When you're running at 20 to 25 frames per second, you don't know why you dodged a missile – it just kind of happens," opines Jaffe. "But when you're running at 60 frames you think: 'Oh, I can see what happened. I hit this little dip and the missile flew right over my roof.'" Granted, the improved refresh rates common to Dreamcast and PS2 titles are regarded as standard these days, and would usually not warrant an extended mention. With a game such as this, however, the ability to clearly track the progress of projectiles is a massive boon. Without it, too many combat exchanges would feel arbitrary – a shortcoming that often blighted earlier installments.

Naturally, *Twisted Metal Black* will incorporate a fourplayer mode but, disappointingly, the team feels that a 60fps frame rate during such sessions is beyond the ken of the PS2 hardware – it will default to a more processor-friendly 30fps. Additionally, enjoyable multiplayer matches with more than two participants will most likely be the sole preserve of those that own large televisions – Incognito has no plans at present to include support for networked multiplayer via FireWire. With its 360-degree movement and detailed scenery, *Twisted Metal Black* may be awkward to play in a quarter of a screen.

By opting for a more visceral, violent approach, there is a real danger that Incognito may be denying itself access to a large portion of the gaming demographic: teenagers. As *Carmageddon 3* recently proved, the ability to plough through pedestrians and into other cars is a gimmick of dubious commercial merit. If codeshop and publisher alike can convince the gaming public of its true strength as an unpretentious (in terms of gameplay), potentially fun hybrid of the driving and FPS genres, *Twisted Metal Black* could mark a return to form for a once-strong franchise.





There is a choice between horizontal and vertical splits for twoplayer games. Fourplayer battles, however, are (perhaps unavoidably) hard on the eyes

Floigan Brothers

The creator of the critically acclaimed *NFL 2K1* turns its hand to adventure creation with a title that promises to further blur the boundaries between cartoons and videogames





There are approximately a dozen minigames to play – including an aside involving gardening (above)

Moigle craves (and requires) plenty of attention, but not 'feed the Tamagotchi'-style pet care. "Moigle should never be a chore," says lead designer Andy Ashcroft. Moigle's AI is inspired by research at MIT

Despite a protracted development period, *Floigan Brothers* may be one of the most inventive Dreamcast games thus far – a compliment of some worth, as DC owners will attest. Its premise, in short, is superb. Its two stars, Hoigle and Moigle, possess contrasting abilities. The player-controlled Hoigle is bright, but lacks physical strength and stature. Conversely, Moigle – guided by extensive AI code and scripts – is enormous, hugely strong, can consort with animals, and has an affinity for machinery. Through interaction between the two, players can solve puzzles and explore.

Much of *Floigan Brothers'* action involves prompting, even manipulating, Moigle to achieve a desired result. To cross a creek, for example, you can make Moigle cry – which, with due adherence to the cartoon logic, raises the water level in order to allow the pair to progress. Another instance requires Hoigle to pick a fight with his larger associate; losing his temper, Moigle clobbers Hoigle, who lands on a previously inaccessible catwalk. Playing with Moigle's simple emotions is a basis for many conundrums. Compellingly, there are depths to his character that can be exploited – he loves animals, hates spiders, and can be corrupted with a suitable bribe. Project manager **Andy Ashcroft** attributes the title's prolonged development period to perfecting his behaviour. Intriguingly, the manner in which you treat Moigle will affect his development throughout the game.

Perhaps the most exciting element of *Floigan Brothers'* design is the fact that so many items and objects within its gameworld are truly interactive. It is an adventure that places a definite onus upon exploration and experimentation. Given that so many games offer lavish environments that, with a moment's perusal, are revealed to be little more than pretty backdrops, this is a genuinely next-generation development. This may, however, make it a rather short-lived experience. The reason that so many codeshops eschew 'realistic' levels of interactivity is a practical one: there is a proportional relationship between detail and size, as *Shenmue* – gargantuan development team and all – demonstrates. It may be, of course, that a short (yet highly accomplished) animated adventure is Sega's goal. Rumours currently abound that there are plans for further

Perhaps the most exciting element of *Floigan Brothers'* design is the fact that so many items and objects in its gameworld are interactive

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Visual Concepts**
Origin: **US**
Release: **March (US) TBC (UK)**





Floigan Brothers adventures; talk of episodic releases, with each having a distinct theme, is rife. Sega, tellingly, has yet to deny such educated conjecture. Indeed, Ashcroft is keen: "We want to make a lot of these. I love these characters, and I love the gameplay."

Although the comedic value of early scenes viewed by **Edge** was obvious, the presence of any real substance to each puzzle was not. Each key moment appeared to involve little in the way of cerebrally taxing content, with action button presses evoking key moments after highly obvious prompts. With videogames, interplay is king – and, as beguiling as *Floigan Brothers'* set-pieces are, the sequences **Edge** witnessed alluded to the disquieting prospect of the player being a passenger, rather than a pilot. If later sections can offer a challenge more weighty than button presses on demand, this pleasingly individual game could further cement the Dreamcast's reputation as a hotbed of original content. Much also depends on the skill of the voice actors hired to lend aural accompaniment to the accomplished aesthetics – a poor performance in this respect could render the game an immediate failure.

Having long displayed promise, *Floigan Brothers* continues to evoke plenty of 'what ifs?' Only extended play, it seems, will provide conclusive answers. **Edge**, like many others, remains charmed, but a little apprehensive of how the final product will turn out.



The inclusion of a *Zelda*-inspired onscreen display for pad functionality is an inspired move – especially with so many moments involving context-sensitive actions. Visual Concepts has picked its influences wisely

Spiker's Battle

Format: Coin-op
Manufacturer: Sega
Developer: In-house (Amusement Vision)
Origin: Japan
Release: Q1 (Japan)

Amusement Vision brings hi-octane rucking to the arcades, growing a belligerent brawler out of *Spike Out* that allows you to strike foes with whatever comes to hand



Nagoshi-san's Amusement Vision comprises many ex-AM2 members, so it's not really a surprise to find *Spiker's Battle* – not so much a sequel to *Spike Out* as a spin-off – takes key elements from both *Virtua Fighter* and *Fighting Vipers*. Equally unsurprisingly, the Naomi-based game sticks strongly to the characteristic *Spike Out* dynamic, meaning the game concentrates less on martial arts technicalities and more on aggression and impact.

Retaining the liberty of movement that made the first game so popular, *Spiker's Battle* places the player in one of several urban arenas and asks them to punch, kick, and fling their way to violent supremacy. Essentially, it's *Final Fight* in full 3D, with making the best use of your limited special moves being crucial to success. Objects can also be used to pummel opponents, as can parts of the scenery that might normally be dismissed as background aesthetics. Fallen enemies can be picked up and thrown at other adversaries, and plate-glass windows satisfyingly shatter as bodies tumble through them. Those broken bodies should be recognisable to *Spike Out* fans, since all the characters from the first game reappear here, as well as some new ones.



The game environments are fairly selfconsciously urban, with diners, basketball courts, and corporate public areas ranking high on the list

A fourplayer mode is available, but only by in arcades able to afford the luxury of multiple cabinets. As well as the standard beat 'em up Versus modes, Amusement Vision intends to include some form of co-operative play, which might sit awkwardly in the context of the often antagonistic arcade fighter scene. Regardless, players can observe their relative positions using a miniature onscreen map, and can co-ordinate their moves accordingly.

In terms of controls, *Spiker's Battle* follows the *Spike Out* model, and thus remains substantially simpler than *Generic Fighter Ex*. There are three fighting buttons – attack, charge, and jump – as well as a change view button that flips the camera around, helpful for those rage-inducing moments when the only thing that stands between you and an enemy is the horrendous viewing angle. The charge button lets the player concentrate his strength, which in turn allows access to four special types of attack. In addition, moving while holding down the view button will keep the view focused on the same spot.

Graphically luscious, the *Spike* series' return to the fighting arena is welcome, especially when it looks set to inject some new verve into a genre appearing increasingly stale. *Spiker's Battle* might not be a huge departure from *Spike Out*, but it still looks likely to temporarily placate those 3D fighting fans desperate for Nagoshi to okay a Dreamcast conversion.





One of the more interesting features of *Spiker's Battle* is the ability to use items in the environment – even the bodies of fallen fighters – as weapons







Aggression and impact are the currency of combat in *Spiker's Battle*, which is unsurprising given that the title is essentially a spin-off of *Spike Out* – so a representation of martial arts finesse isn't on the cards

Extermination

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **Deep Space**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March 8 (Japan) TBC (UK)**

If Deep Space's new title doesn't bring anything fresh to the survival horror party, can it then only be seen as contributing to the genre's seemingly inevitable demise?

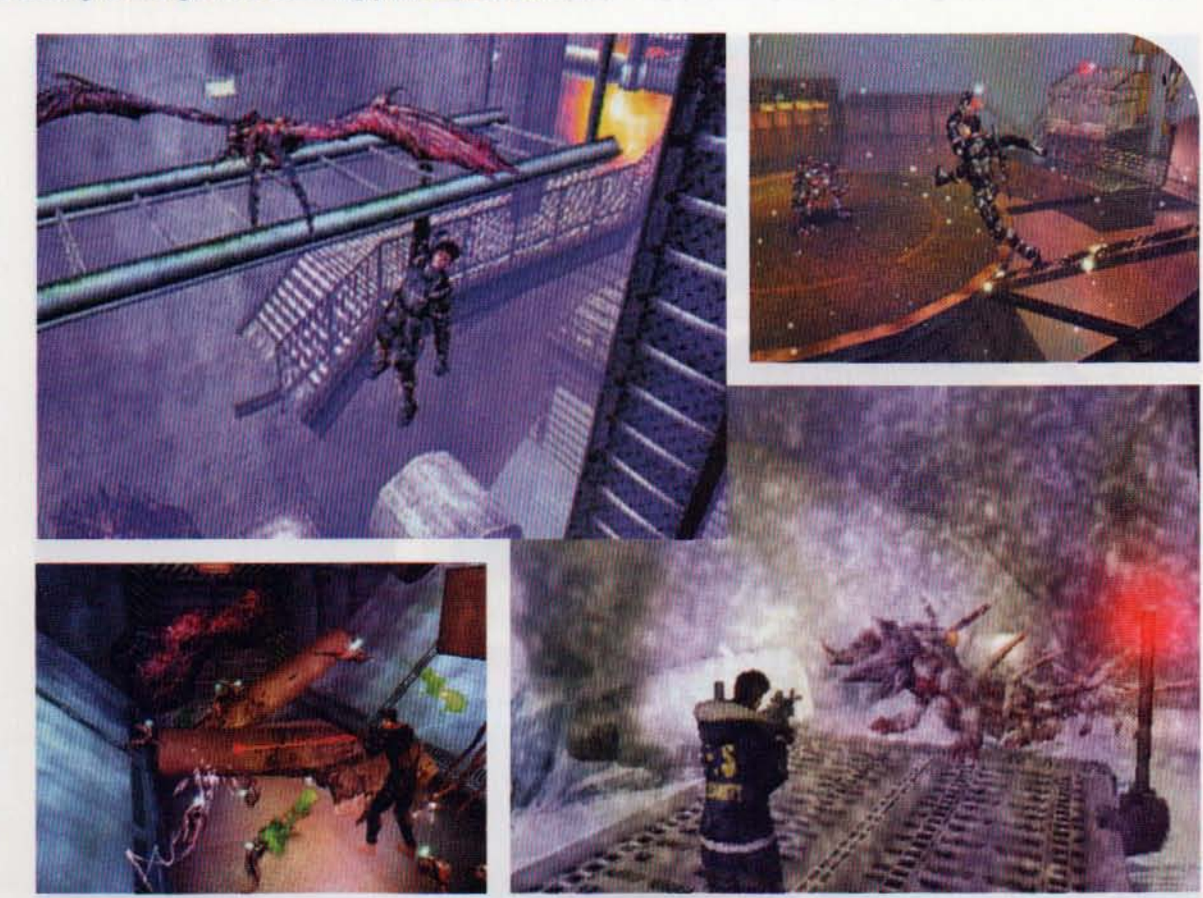
Unlike many of those present, **Edge** was left remarkably unimpressed when *Extermination* was first shown at last February's PlayStation Festival 2000. It wasn't so much the graphical quality – or, more to the point, the lack of it – but rather the appearance that this was simply another survival horror with nothing new to offer.

Worryingly, most of the people who witnessed the presentation (even those that should have known better) were completely taken in, believing the (admittedly pretty) prerendered footage to represent realtime visuals. A year earlier, SCEI may well have used the same precalculated scenes as a supposed indication of the PS2's muscle but these days the reality is still a long way from that initial 1999 announcement.

Oddly, nothing on the game has been shown since, but SCEI now appears more prepared to spill the beans: you play a member of a special commando unit who is sent on a recon mission after communication with a secret base in Antarctica is lost. Perhaps predictably, your transport crashes just before it gets there, and you and a team mate are left on your own – lost, and, inevitably, in danger.

Eventually you find the damaged base, the obligatory love interest, and many more classics of the genre: discoverable weaponry, cinematic cut scenes, ladder climbing, platform jumping, wall scaling, and, of course, mutant monster slaying. The latter are a genetic mélange of the villainous casts from *Blue Stinger* and *Parasite Eve*, lending the game a *Super Metroid/Biohazard*-esque atmosphere.

As with its previous appearance, visuals still leave much to be desired. Textures are poorly detailed, the sense of depth isn't necessarily convincing, and lighting is hardly exemplary. But at least the antialiasing effect appears well implemented and the various semi-fixed camera angles seem not to hinder playability, often opting for a chase-cam approach when the action requires it. It's still difficult to tell just what exactly separates this from the other countless survival horrors that currently exist, or those that will appear in months to come, which leaves **Edge** attempting to understand Sony's thinking. Sure, it's a popular genre, but it's also one that is in serious risk of suffering from oversaturation. Lacklustre visuals and tried and overtested gameplay are no good to anyone, and they are extremely unlikely to excite a potential user base.



Yawn if you've seen it all before: on current form, *Extermination* doesn't appear to want to add anything too different, or, for that matter, interesting to the survival horror debate. But you never know



Though it may be deliberately intended by the developer, use of colour such as in the scene immediately above is rare in the game – most of the time the action occurs amid tones of grey and brown, that, although varied, don't make it easy to get genuinely excited about *Extermination*'s visual accomplishments

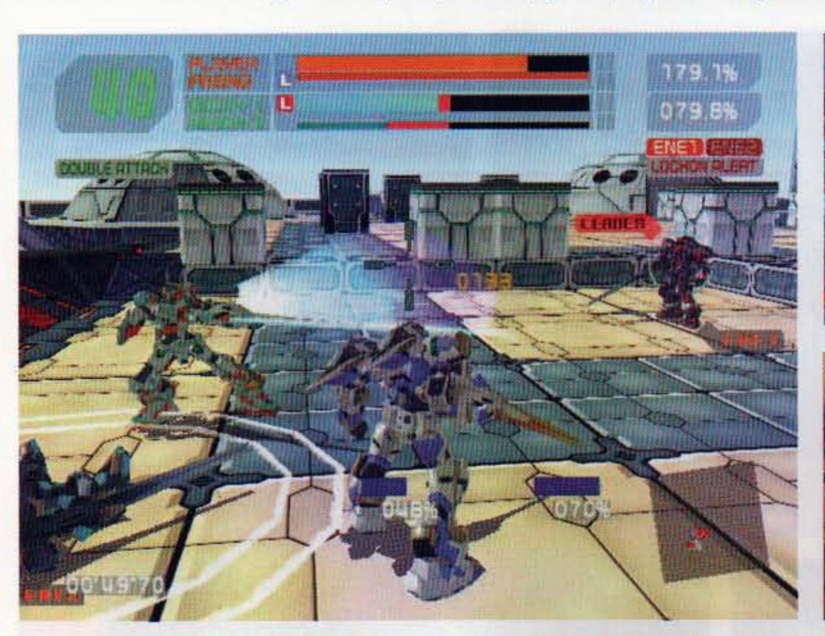
Exterminator in chief

Extermination is the work of Fujiwara Tokuroshi, former Capcom developer responsible for notable productions such as *Ghosts 'n' Goblins*, *Rockman*, and, predictably, *Biohazard*. Having left the beat 'em up specialist to set up his own company, Whoopee Camp (developer of the amusing and inventive *Ora Tomba!* and its sequel), Fujiwara-san is now developing his latest creation under new outfit Deep Space. At this stage, how this affects Whoopee Camp remains unclear

Virtual On Force

Format: **Coin-op**
Manufacturer: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house (Hit Maker)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q1 (Japan)**

Another *Virtual On* game makes its way to the arcades, but this instalment looks set to include significant (and positive) gameplay-affecting modifications













The teamplay element, one that has been requested by *VO* fans for a number of years, should alter the dynamics of the game significantly, requiring an entirely new strategic approach as teammates plan their offensive manoeuvres, given that the game ends as soon as one of the leaders is turned into a pile of junk

If games had feelings, there would be some seriously disgruntled titles out there – some with reason, but most without. The gaming public can be a brutally discerning group at times.

However, you wouldn't expect the *Virtual On* series to ever feel unappreciated. Fighting robots within a three-dimensional arena has proved an unsurprisingly popular concept with Japan's arcade-goers, and with subsequent versions improving on the formula with new mechs and bigger, better stages, Sega's *Virtual On* coin-ops have remained at or near the top of that nation's arcade machine popularity charts for as long as anyone cares to remember.

After several, albeit enjoyable, evolutions, the *Virtual On* franchise appears set for genuine change. Whereas the robots remain similar to the past instalments, the new stages boast a far more elaborate structure than any of their predecessors, but neither of these are as significant as the inclusion of the Team Battle mode, which for the first time allows fourplayer battles to occur in a two-vs-two configuration. A leader for each side is elected before the game begins, and then it's up to your team to turn the opposing leader robot into shrapnel before the time runs out. If this fails to occur, victory is handed over to the team retaining the largest amount of energy once their health bars are combined.

Typically, a radar displays each of the players' positions, which you can use as a guide to lock on to your enemy, but as with all *Virtual On* games, mastery of the dual-joystick controls is the only way of ensuring victory. An addition to your fighter's repertoire is Rescue Dash, which enables you to rush over to help your teammate, who may be in a perilous spot, by generously sharing some of your own health points.

A brief 'on test' appearance in selected Tokyo arcades reaffirmed the gaming public's enthusiasm for Sega's *VO* series as players rapidly queued up to try this latest version. Whereas in the past AM2 ensured Sega's was the name at the top of the console charts, in these post-Sega restructuring days, increasingly that role now seems to have been taken over by Hit Maker. On current form, *Virtual On Force* only looks certain to strengthen this perception.

Virtually assured

Traditionally, the *Virtual On* world has made the transition into the home via Sega's own consoles. The original *VO* title eventually appeared on a Saturn that displayed astounding prowess in trying to mimic the game's vastly more powerful arcade board, while it proved slightly less painful for the Dreamcast to handle *VO Oratorio Tangram*. Given that the DC includes a dedicated control unit amid its optional peripherals, expect *Virtual On Force* to follow suit in the not-too-distant future.

Paris-Dakar Rally

Format: **PlayStation2, PC**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **Broadsword Interactive**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q3**

UK developer Broadsword Interactive is poised to offer gamers the opportunity to compete in a fully licensed version of the Paris-Dakar – and it's about time, too

In yet another display of the absolute short-termist view that stifles the videogame industry, it is only now in the 21st century that a publisher has bothered to acquire the full rights to the Paris-Dakar licence, a gruelling event spanning some 6,500 miles and featuring 350 competitors on bikes, off-roaders, buggies, and trucks that would make perfect videogame fodder – if handled correctly, of course.

Looking to do just that is UK developer Broadsword Interactive, previously responsible for the not-so-correct *Spirit of Speed 1937*. Still, believing every one deserves more than one chance, **Edge** is prepared to give Broadsword the benefit of the doubt.

On paper, at least, things are looking promising: 24 playable licensed vehicles (seven cars, six buggies, six bikes, five quad bikes), 12 rally stages, multiple routes, changing conditions, animal encounters, extensive realtime damage, handling configuration, Dolby Surround score, and anamorphic widescreen mode are just some of the features listed.

Acclaim is looking to reveal more on this potentially excellent title over the next couple of months. Expect a more substantial report around that time.







The developer should be attempting to incorporate many features of the rally into the game – in addition to retirements, competitors usually spend hours on their own, which could make things rather tedious for the average player. Knowing how to structure the game so as to ensure most people remain hooked will be key

Project Eden

Format: **PlayStation2, PC**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Core Design**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q1**

Core Design continues to work on its ambitious FPS, in which the player controls four characters, but the developer is still reluctant to reveal certain elements of the title







The four characters in *Project Eden* each have their own special skills. Separating the party at key points will be necessary to make progress, but will leave members vulnerable to attacks. Although characters will defend themselves and alert you to their danger, the quality of the AI will be important to the games ultimate success. A novel energy system should reduce any potential frustration

Controlling four characters in an FPS while enemies attack your position is a hugely ambitious game premise, and could turn into a frustrating mess. But Core is optimistic that the balance between frenzied corridor shooting and using the three other members of the team to overcome problems will be met.

Incisive AI is crucial. While the player can switch between characters and assign commands, their level of perceived independence will be important. Thankfully, if one character dies it does not necessarily mean game over. An inventive energy system is being used which can resurrect felled comrades and recharge weapons. The inclusion of gadgets such as flycams and exploratory vehicles should ensure that *Project Eden* is more than a run-of-the-mill 3D shooter.

Since first encountering the title in May last year, **Edge** hasn't detected any major overhauls to the solid environments in the game. Enemies are still peculiarly absent from most areas, but the developer is keen to keep the morphing dynamic of most opponents under wraps. *Project Eden* has still got much to prove, but if all the elements work, then a co-operative mode and a planned deathmatch option will add much to a promising package.

C-12: Final Resistance

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: In-house (Studio Cambridge)
Origin: UK
Release: Q1

Your chance to fight the forces of apocalyptic alien evil as soldier-turned-mutant Lieutenant Vaughan, but you'll also need to fend off feelings of déjà vu







It's graphically accomplished for a PSone title, but control feels oddly dated and occasionally awkward. Enemies tend to be few and far between, although, to be fair, things could get busier in later levels. Also, ECTS talk of being able to enter buildings is only half true, seeing as the majority of the edifices **Edge** encountered had textures for doors

Unveiled at last year's ECTS, Sony's shooter had all the markings of some Hollywood sci-fi actioner turned into a videogame. The premise, though clichéd, suited the onscreen happenings rather well, as your character (soldier-turned-mutant Lieutenant Vaughan), shot and exploded his way from one post-apocalyptic area to the next.

Many elements have remained constant. There is still a wide selection of weapons to choose from, the alien entities are still distinctive, and the overall look of the game continues to impress, given that it's running on six-year-old technology.

Less impressive is the way the game plays. There's a sense of déjà vu from the off, your character moving as in countless other PS titles of this nature. Combat works in the three-dimensional environment largely thanks to a lock-on function, but things can still feel clumsy.

What's most disappointing is the sense that you've done all this before. For instance, within a few minutes of starting a new game, you'll be asked to engage in some block-pulling, ladder climbing, and switch activating. Presumably the potential hinted at in the ECTS demonstration makes itself evident later in the game.

Monster Farm 3

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: Q1 (Japan)

Tecmo raises its game in the hope of battling PS2 owners into submission the way it managed to conquer the hearts and minds of the N64 crowd

At the recent Jump Festa 2000 event, Tecmo proudly displayed playable code of the third *Monster Farm* venture. The reason for the company's pride escaped **Edge**, given that this PS2 incarnation offers little innovation or improvement over its predecessors.

The aim of *Monster Farm 3* also remains true to the series: raise and strengthen your farm monster to prepare it for a life of endless battling. But that's not the only element to have been borrowed from another game – things may have improved visually, but the graphical style won't be altogether unfamiliar to *Jet Set Radio* aficionados.

What is very new, as far as the franchise is concerned, is the battle control system interface. Each of the four main buttons corresponds to a distinct action, each of which carries a respective action-point penalty. In the playable demo, a circular gauge represented the action point total. A bar at the bottom of the screen determines the action of the button pressed, and is a way of ensuring battles feel more dynamic.

The demo wasn't sufficiently advanced to offer a decent indication of the quality of the final product, but whatever the outcome, it'll be interesting to see how the franchise fares on PS2 given that traditionally these titles focus on the N64 market.







The cartoon-like graphical style would appear to primarily target the children's market, but as anyone who's played *Pokémon* will tell you, you can count on the odd kidult or two to inveigle their way into the raising/battling crowd

Para Para Paradise

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q1 (Japan)**

Hand-jive your way to heaven with the help of Konami's new rhythm title, based on a dance craze that's currently sweeping Japan

Following Sega's *Samba* success, Konami has entered into the hand-jive gaming arena with *Para Para Paradise*. Based on Para Para, the re-emerging Japanese dance craze where entire dance floors copy the hand movements of a single leader, *Paradise* sees the player attach controlling devices to each of their hands, then follow onscreen instructions and funk their way to success. A four-sensor USB mat beneath detects the position and timing of the hand movements, and while the game can also be played with the PlayStation Dual Shock 2, to do so is really missing the point.

As well as the familiar arcade conversion, the game offers a Free mode for the less competitive player, and a Training mode for beginners. There's also an Endless mode for strong-armed masochists, and the four levels of difficulty within each provide plenty of opportunity for dedicated wrist twisters to unlock all the bonus stages and extra songs.

The music, a heady mixture of techno and dance, might not capture everyone's imagination in the same way the nu-metal cover of A-ha's *Take On Me* managed to in *Samba de Amigo*, but it's the innate human desire to continuously make a public fool of yourself that holds the key to *Para Para Paradise*'s success.



Strap sensors to your hands, and it's time to jive your way to *Para Para Paradise* along with a techno-dance soundtrack. While you can play the game using a Dual Shock 2, to do so would be even more foolish than to go the whole hog





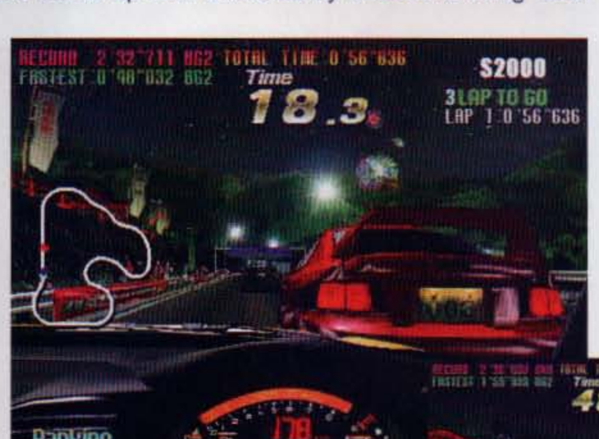
Battle Gear 2

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Taito**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March (Japan)**

The appropriate dashboard from the in-car view, 30 models to choose between, and seven tracks – Taito seems to have come up with a decidedly underwhelming racer







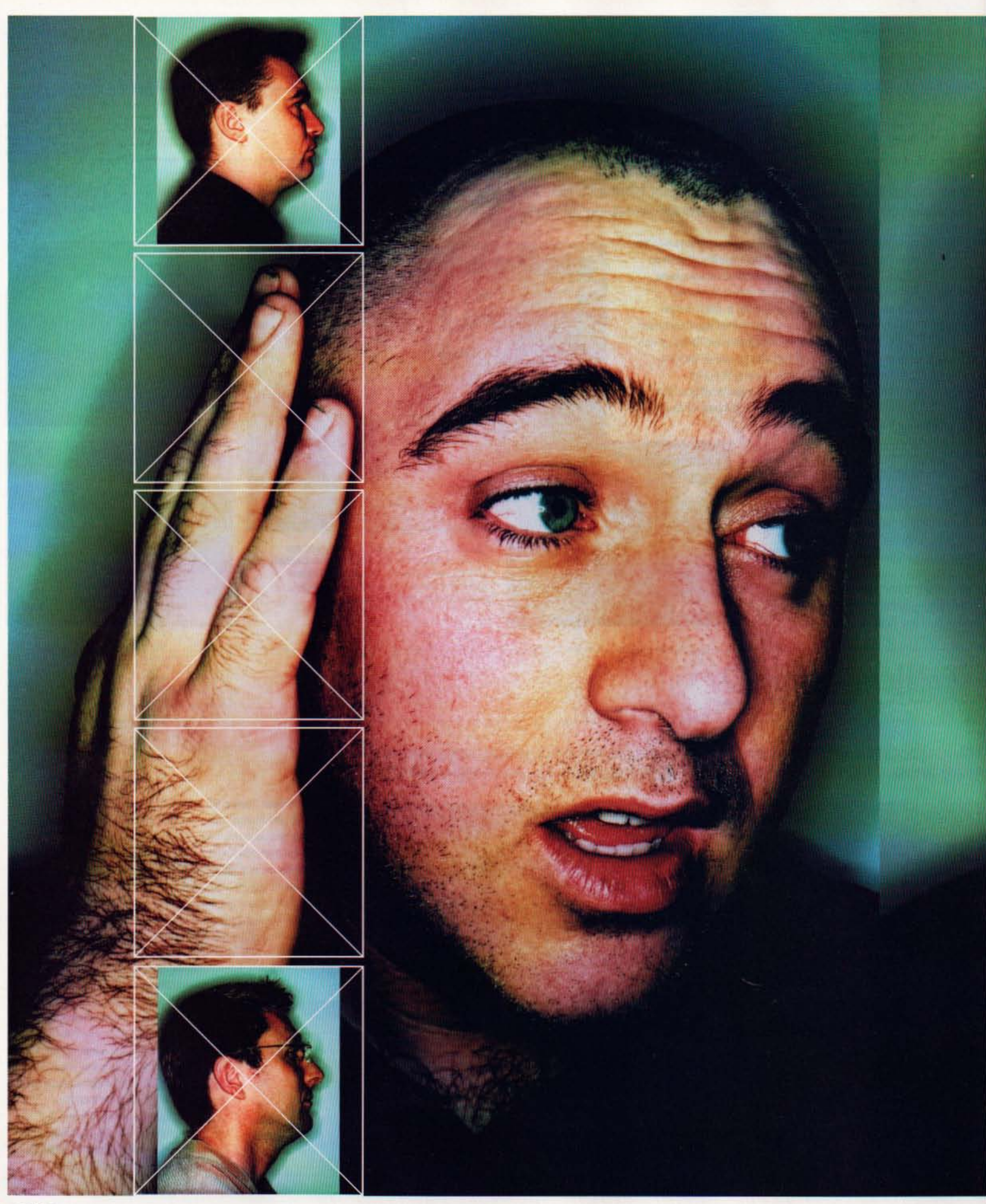
The various dashboards may have been recreated from the actual car models but a few more polygons wouldn't have hurt the overall exterior appearance. What is here is not particularly spectacular, then, but it's not necessarily looking like a disastrous 128bit start to the series, either

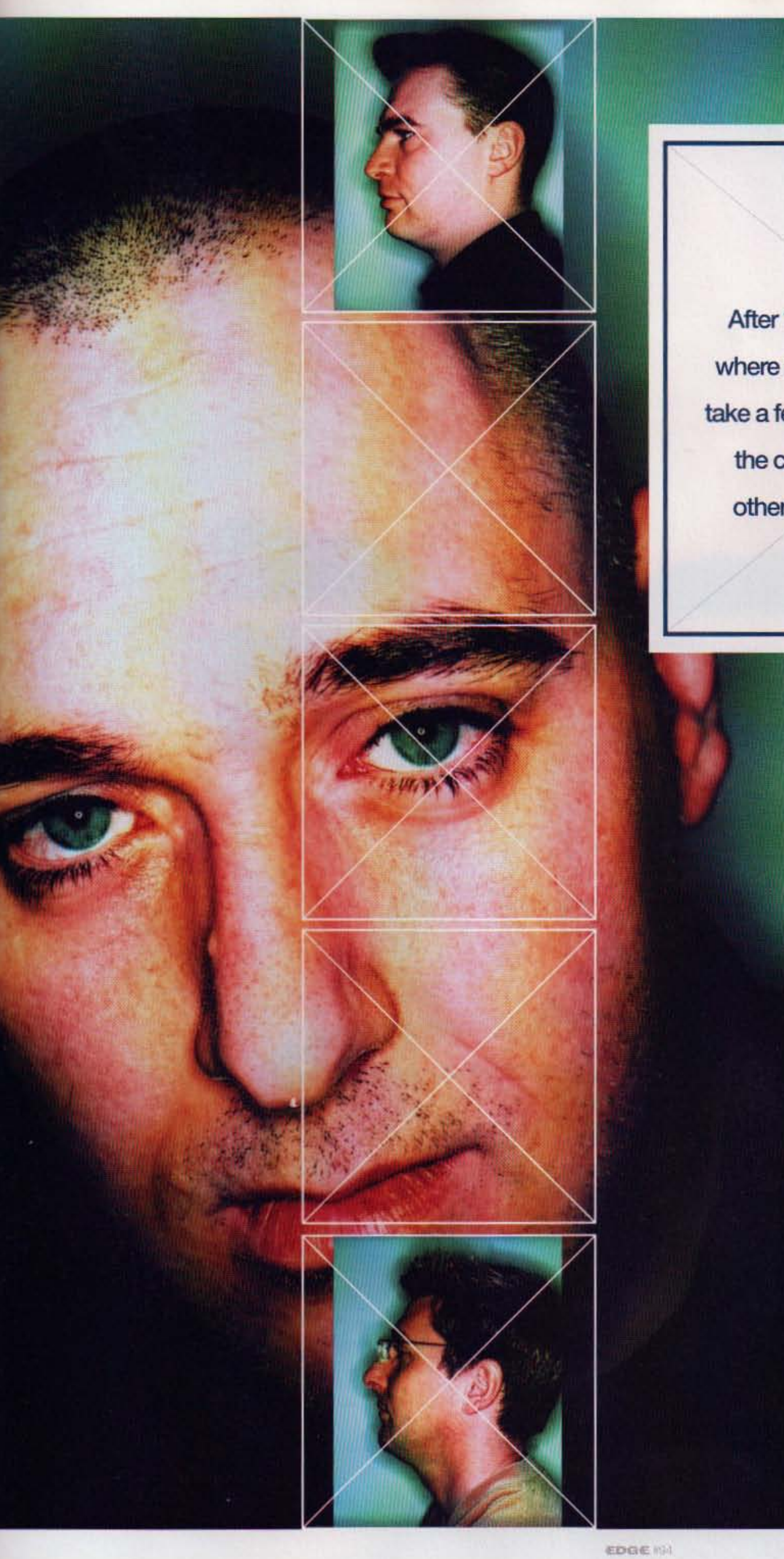
Battle Gear 2 takes the foolproof recipe of driving a selection of fast cars through Japan's traffic-free country roads, an image that should prove immediately appealing to anyone who has had the misfortune of finding themselves stuck in one of Tokyo's rush-hour traffic jams. It's not the most comprehensive package, however: just seven circuits feature, and two play modes are offered.

In Normal mode you get to race your way through the increasingly tricky stages while trying to keep your three competitors behind your rear axle, while Time Attack simply pits you against your ghost.

It's not just the number of tracks or gaming modes that are limited: only six manufacturers feature (Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Mazda, Honda, and Subaru), but at least the car choice is a more acceptable 30, even if some of these are different interpretations of the same model. It's not a graphical revolution, either, with backgrounds made up of a 2D/3D synthesis, but at least a certain attention to detail has made it into the game, such as the appropriate dashboard, for instance.

Still, at this stage it looks more accomplished than Genki's *Shutokou Battle 0*, even if, unlike the latter, *Battle Gear 2* doesn't appear to offer compatibility with a force-feedback wheel.





Photography: **Martin Thompson**

Inside…

Climax

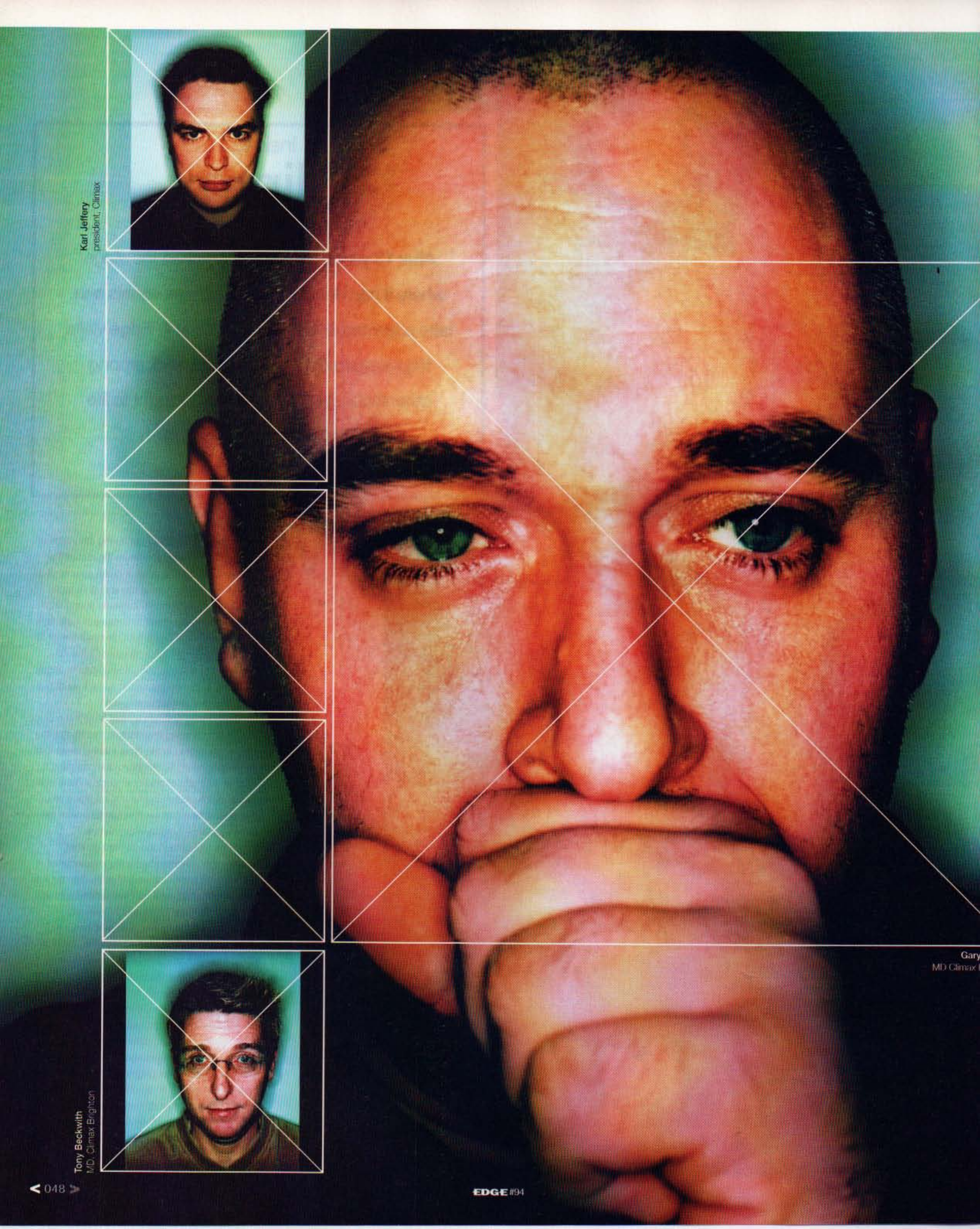
After 13 years, Climax has reached the stage where it can deal with publishers as equals and take a few creative risks while it's at it. Edge visits the company's Fareham office, and, among other titles, sees *Warhammer* brought to life for the online generation

Walk past any Games Workshop during the summer holidays and… well, you know the rest of the sentence. It's as well-worn a cliché as any, used in both the mainstream press and lad's style mags to conjure images of sweaty young men who possess an unhealthy obsession with orcs 'n' goblins. But if Climax fulfils the promise of its massively ambitious *Warhammer Online* title, there won't be any sweaty young men in shops because they'll be reluctant to leave their digital kingdoms and armies unattended.

Since being announced last May, the project is steadily gathering momentum, but it's not the only string to the Climax bow. Having expanded into Brighton and Nottingham, the company is another example of bedroom coders done good and is rapidly acquiring the sort of critical mass that should lead it to be considered one of the British software industry's big names.

Since it was founded in 1988 by **Karl Jeffery**, the company has a huge number of games to its name, ranging from *R-Type* on the ST, through *Warcraft II* for PlayStation, right up to *Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue* on PlayStation. There is also a healthy handheld division, although, as Jeffery explains, the cost of GBA cartridges necessitates a move away from Nintendo's hardware and into the realm of other handheld devices. Not, he specifies, with the lemming-like enthusiasm that many other developers are demonstrating.

In addition to *Warhammer Online*, there are a number of titles currently in development, particularly at Climax Brighton, where work is proceeding apace on a number of motorsports titles. Although most of these are currently under wraps, Climax Brighton MD **Tony Beckwith** is on hand to demonstrate some of the techniques the company is using to produce more convincing racing games (see **E**93 for



Karl Jeffery
president, Climax
Gary
MD Climax
Tony Beckwith
MD, Climax Brighton

more information on Climax's Dyne engine). As he explains to **Edge**, switching from polygons to patches is one such approach: "Patches are essentially a curved surface description, and if you give it the polygons it will use them. The more polygons, the more curved the surface. We can therefore use them to produce more curved tracks and vehicles. So, in the distance you can use a small amount of triangles, but as you step up the vehicles get rounder and smoother, and we don't have to keep redrawing all of our geometry." While there was some initial resistance from artists used to working with polygons, the results – particularly in a motorbike racing demo running on PlayStation2 – bode well for the other projects in the pipeline. As Jeffery explains: "I really believe we are ahead of the curve technology-wise, and it's a big component of the market."

Bringing Warhammer online

Of course, the world of motorsports is pretty much far removed from the goblin fanatics and forces of chaos that inhabit the *Warhammer* world, but it is fair to say that Games Workshop has influenced a whole generation of videogamers, not least through co-founder Ian Livingstone's position at Eidos. And with almost 100 per cent of *Warhammer* enthusiasts also owning consoles, now is as good a time as any to bring that heritage up to date for the digital era, as **Robin Dews**, who is in charge of the company's product development, explains: "Bringing *Warhammer* to the online world seems such a 'right time right place' opportunity. Although we've had great success with licensed products in the past, we've always been looking for someone who shares our vision. In Climax, we've found a partner who, rather than simply seeing *Warhammer* as just another 'swords 'n' sorcery' fantasy universe, have fully grasped the depth, breadth, and dark imagery of this world that we've been creating, developing and setting games in for almost 20 years now. We truly believe that the guys at Climax will be able to bring all our shared visions of horror, heroism and Warhammer to life. Computer licences have always been slightly peripheral to our main business of breathing life into the worlds of Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 through the creation of games, scenarios, artwork, illustrations, and miniatures. This deal and the people involved will ensure that the self-same production values that make Games Workshop games and miniatures the best in the world will also apply to *Warhammer Online*."

The deal between the two companies sees them setting up a joint venture, with both Dews and Rick Priestley, co-creator of the original *Warhammer*, involved in the design of the game. "We're going to be working with GW for at least five years," states Jeffery, "and potentially forever because we're equity partners in the company – we are the company now, and it's a really big thing to us, being a smaller company and it being such a big opportunity, we're going to put everything into it. That's why I think it will work, unlike some of the previous GW videogames." Games like the obscure *Blood Bowl* release are indeed indicative of some of the worse attempts to translate GW franchises, but Climax is setting its aim slightly higher. "We want to create a game that if someone had never heard of *Warhammer*, they would still think it an awesome game and might be driven into buying some of the traditional products," continues Jeffery. "We're not relying on this licence; the assets and material that GW bring to it are just a springboard. Beyond that we realise that we have to make a game that can stand up against anything else out there."

At this early stage – the game is set for release in 2002 – there is only a technical demo to go by, but in many ways the title is worrying. Given the enthusiasm that the *Warhammer* brand engenders, and given the

"We truly believe that the guys at Climax will be able to bring all our shared visions of horror, heroism, and Warhammer to life"



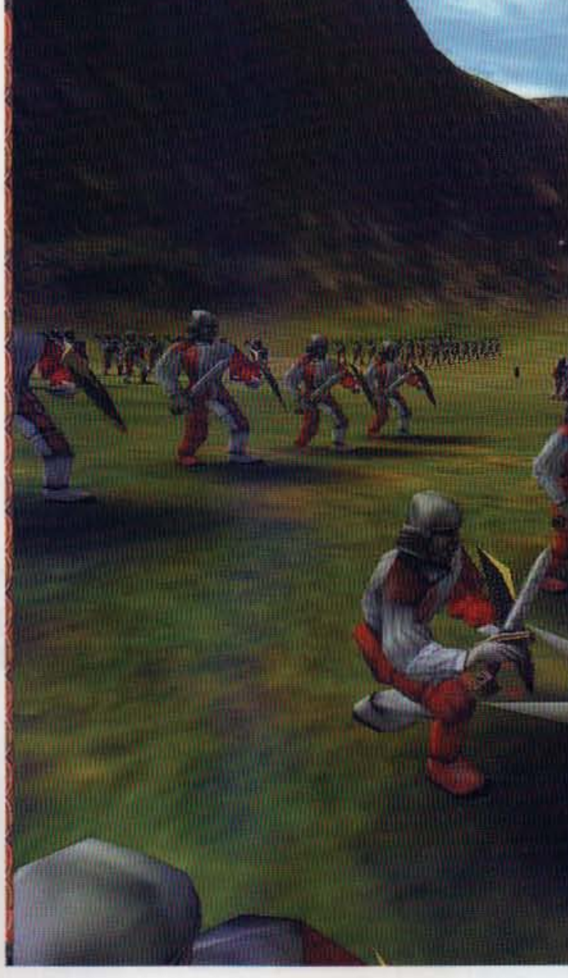


An early demo of *Warhammer Online* demonstrates all the lighting and particle effects that you would expect from a next-generation title, as well as a procedurally scalable map. The really inspiring thing about the game, though, is not the technical accomplishment of the engine, but the ideas that the team is bristling with that will transform it from online RTS into something a lot more consuming



The task of maintaining a persistent world with the complexity of the *Warhammer* universe is going to require ongoing resources, but as producer Matt Sansam points out: "We're trying to create a world state that, with minimal input from us, will impact great changes"











The work being done at Climax Brighton on various motorsports titles may seem a world away from the more traditional fantasy setting being worked on at the Nottingham offices, but it combines the same emphasis on technical accomplishment and gameplay ideas that *Warhammer Online* posesses. This motorcycle demo not only looks wonderful, but next to titles like *Moto GP* plays really well



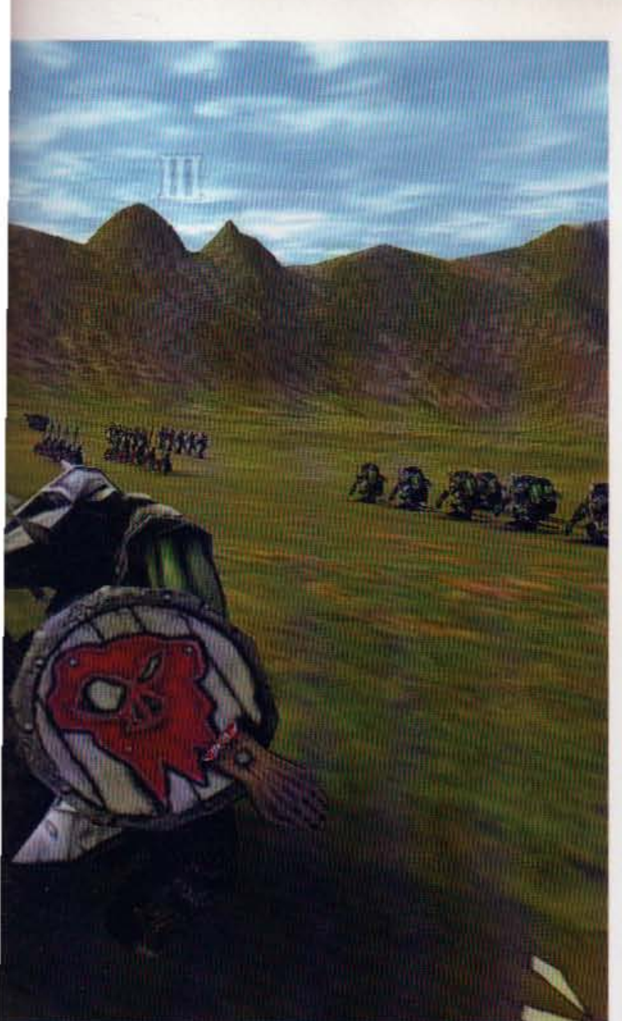
sheer scale of ambition exhibited, this is a game that really could take over the lives of a whole generation of gamers. "The wonderful thing is that although you could just produce an online RTS with *Warhammer*, we've taken it on and on," says Jeffrey. "Online is as new a dimension in gaming as 3D was to 2D. Our dream is of a user interface in which no tutorial is required. A mouse cursor, or a panel or overlay, work against the suspension of disbelief. The whole story is told with the engine – for example, you enter your castle and you're looking at your resources. You don't go in and click on a menu and see that you have 300 units of iron ore, you see the iron ore physically building up." What this means in practice is that in addition to translating the tabletop game to an online environment, the goal is to wrap it in a framework that is every bit as compelling as the core gameplay experience. "The tabletop game is the main part of the game – you've got your armies massed on each side, your opponents have their armies, and you're manoeuvring, and then all hell breaks loose. Above that, though, is the metagame, which is the build-up to that, so there's diplomacy, there's trading, there's resource management. We have this global world, composed of regions or kingdoms, and below that there are domains, which are owned and developed by players. So there's resource management to it. You can progress to the ruler of your race, and if your race is the dominant race then you become the emperor." And what Warhammer devotee could fail to be moved by that? Why leave your room when you can rule a world?

Dews is also keen to make this point.

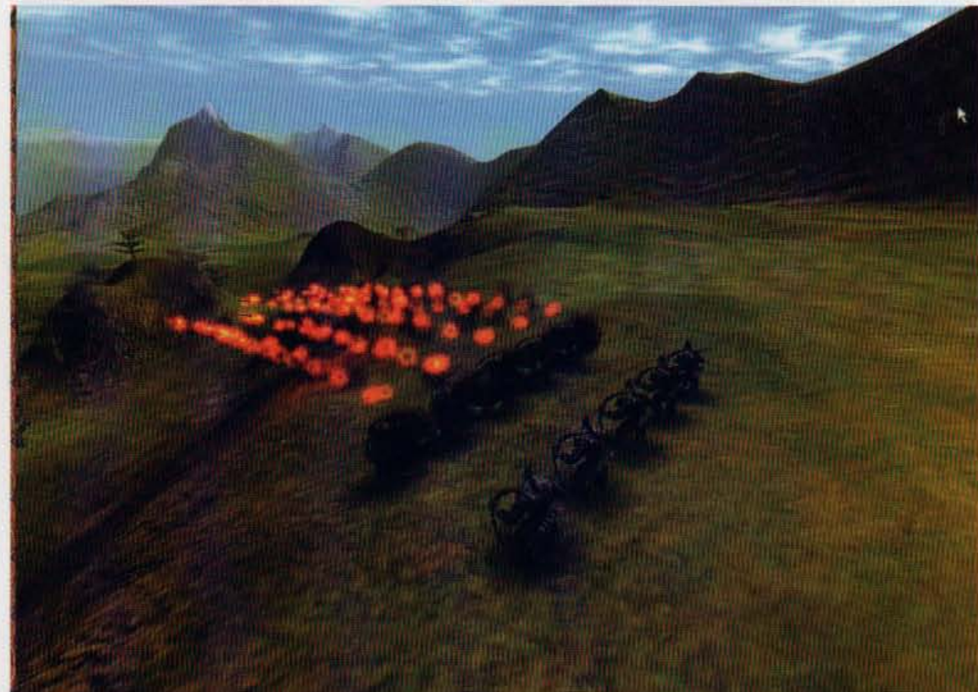




The demo has a particularly authentic feel, from the shadows across the road to the grass that sprays up should riders stray from the track. So it is surprising that a seemingly over-the-top speed blur works so well



Only a few troop types have been implemented in the demo that **Edge** was shown, but the attention to detail bodes well for fans of the Warhammer world, with the style and ethos of the tabletop game captured with aplomb, demonstrated by this orc boar rider (left)



"The key thing to drive home here is that our intention is not to do a computer game of a tabletop game – that would be dull and pointless. Each battle in *Warhammer Online* will be embedded in a metagame that will enable players to experience the full breadth and depth of the *Warhammer* world as they recruit train and develop their armies." Add to this a far-from-tawdry-looking engine that isn't restricted by the constraints that lead miniatures face – and that can grant night vision to appropriate races, and allow customisation of shields and banners, for example – and it becomes obvious that there may be considerable technical difficulties to overcome. But, as Jeffery explains, Climax is determined to overcome them. "We're trying to make as much as possible automated, so that we don't have to have huge customer support teams, but there are plans to have a dimension of human moderation. If you look at what has happened with *EverQuest*, everybody is trying to break the ruleset, so you do have to continuously develop it." Of course, technical partnerships with both Intel and Microsoft on the server side help.

Crossplatform development

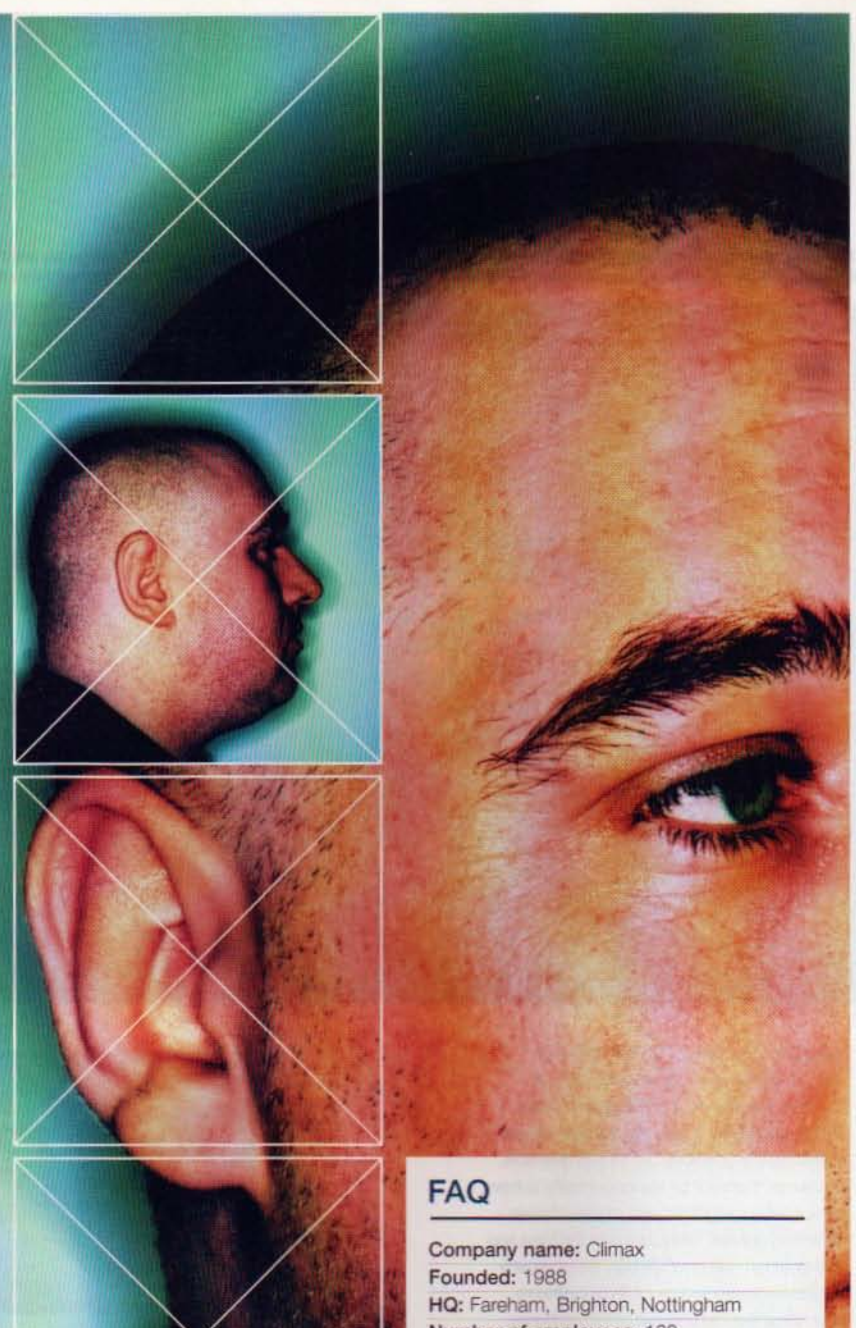
Indeed, given the connection it is likely that after debuting on PC the game will put in an appearance on XBox. "We're finding that Sony aren't really giving us the answers we want regarding broadband, but Microsoft are. They've got a very clear, concise plan of how they're going to do broadband." Says Jeffrey. And doing a persistent world without a hard drive is possible, but it's not desirable." Of course, there will be the opportunity to have compatibility with PDAs and mobile phones for simple upkeep tasks, but with the long and distinguished history of Climax, the company is used to developing on multiple platforms. Describing the rise and rise of the company, Jeffery concedes that he was just a 'spotty kid' when he founded the company, but since then the acquisition of Pixel Planet in Brighton and Anthill Studios in Nottingham (the home of Games Workshop) has allowed the company to grow while retaining its development culture: "One of the reasons for the three locations is so that we don't get too big at any one location, so we can keep that relatively small company atmosphere. They run as three separate studios, so they're semi-autonomous. While each has their own specialisation, we share a lot of technology and tools, so there is an economy of scale." There is also a different emphasis in each of the three locations, with motorsports at Brighton and online at Nottingham, leaving Fareham with mainstream console development and specialist formats like WAP phones and digital TV.

"Our platform choice is not driven by





The potential of *Warhammer Online* to exceed the remit of the tabletop environment is staggering. With the size and appearance of the world's fauna restricted by the constraints of casting in lead, and with special abilities like night vision only semi-realised at best in the traditional game, the Warhammer canon is going to be seriously enriched when the title is finally ready



FAQ

Company name: Climax
Founded: 1988
HQ: Fareham, Brighton, Nottingham
Number of employees: 160
Softography: *Fist* (PC); *AVP* (Lynx); *Shadow Dancer* (Amiga/ST); *Chicago Syndicate* (Game Gear); *Muppets On The Go* (Pico); *Bugs Bunny In Double Trouble* (Mega Drive); *Cybersled* (Saturn); *Warcraft II* (PS/Saturn); *FIFA '98 – Road To World Cup* (Saturn); *Populous: The Beginning* (PS); *NHL Blades of Steel '99* (GBC); *Diablo* (PS); *Battlezone* (N64); *Urban Assault* (PS); *World Superbikes* (PS); *Theme Park World* (PC); *Gauntlet Legends* (GB); *Lego Racers* (GBC); *Lego Alpha Team* (GBC); *Air Force Delta* (GBC); *ATV Quad Power Racing* (PS); *Korean League Stars* (PS); *Premier League Stars* (PS); *Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue* (PS); *Theme Park Inc* (PC)
Projects in development: *Warhammer Online* (PC); motorsports titles; unnamed XBox title



Using patches instead of polygons initially caused some headaches for artists, but the results are more convincing curves. Essential for racing games

technical choice, it's driven by commercial realities," continues Jeffery. "For example, we've dropped Dreamcast and GBC completely because they don't make sense to us financially any more." But, as Climax Fareham MD **Gary Liddon** notes, console wars are nothing new to experienced heads, who started out on Spectrums and C64s. "Years ago you had the Spectrum and Amstrad, and you could write a similar core code for both of those, and then later the ST and the Amiga, where the majority of code was similar as well. Until recently it hasn't been like that, with the N64 unlike the PS and the PC separate. But now you have a set of machines coming out that have broadly similar capabilities in terms of gameplay programming. When you do the hardware-specific stuff you can always add features that will enhance that specific platform, as well. So on XBox you can do grass as a procedural patch, and as you go closer you can increase the shards of grass, but you wouldn't necessarily do that on other platforms."

Given this fact, the company is well positioned for cross-platform development. "Although we're working on a firstparty basis with both Sony and with Microsoft, we've got very good relationships with both of them. I think it really becomes an issue if you've got limited resources." Which, fortunately, is not something that Climax is currently suffering from. "If you've got money, it gives you the freedom to do what you want," picks up Jeffery. "The work that we've done on *Warhammer* has been paid for out of our own pocket, and we're lucky enough to be able to afford to do that now, but five years ago we certainly couldn't. There is a stage you reach, whether you've got the money or you've got the critical mass, or you've got the economies of scale, where you suddenly find that you can deal with publishers as equals." Being able to field three or four teams across different platforms is certainly a trait that attracts publishers, but so is the ability to respond rapidly to market opportunities. "We've done some extremely high-pressure games," explains Liddon, "where publishers have had a requirement for a certain type of product at a certain time – one was a PlayStation game in five months from nothing, which was really hard, but we did it, came in early, and it sold well. It's hard for publishers to find developers that can field a team that's going to be able to

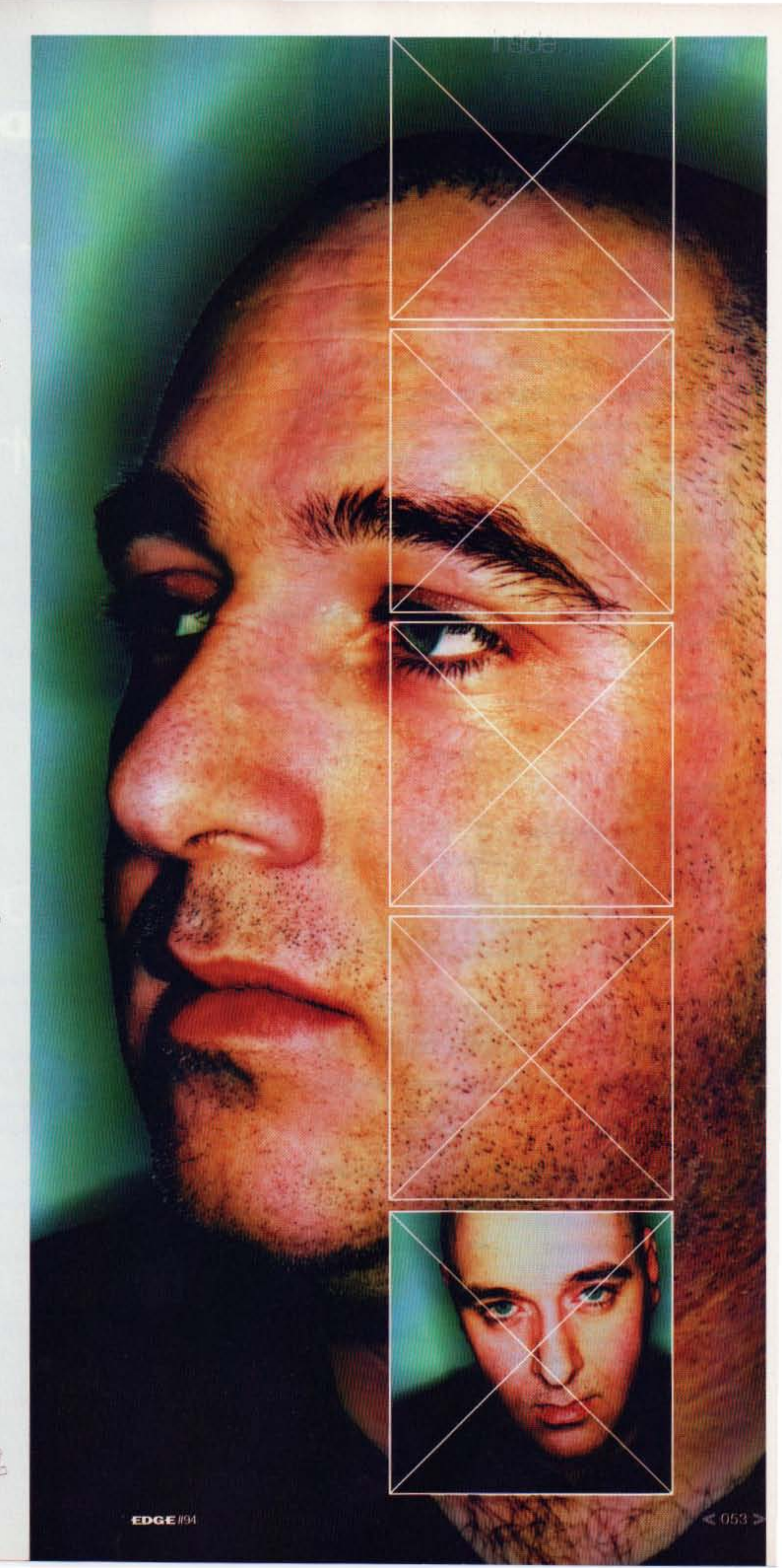
take on a project like that at short notice."

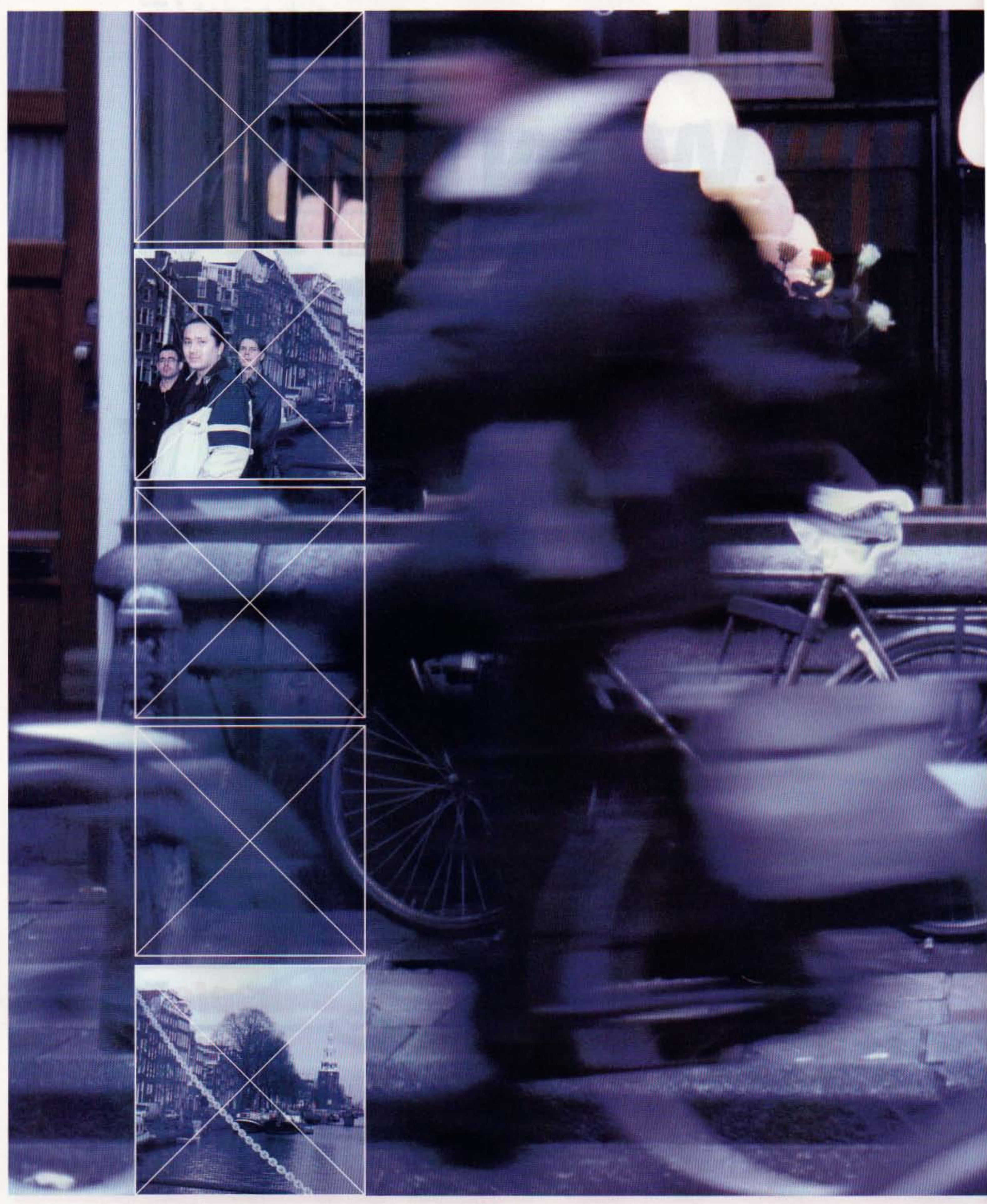
Getting serious

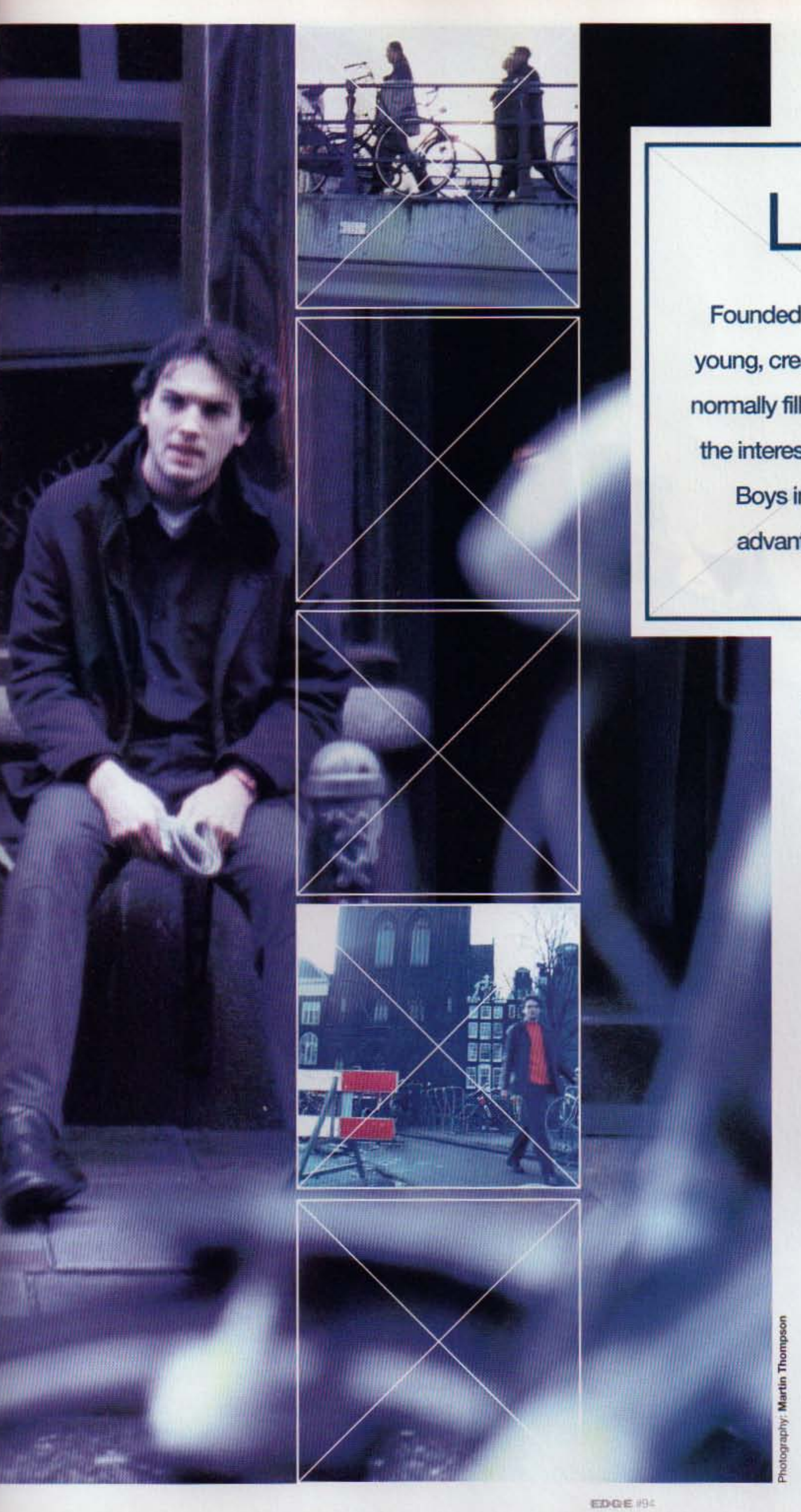
Given the experience of Jeffery, Liddon, and Beckwith, it is unsurprising that they are vocal about the state of the industry. Particularly for the need to approach it with a degree of business maturity. "I'm not making a comment about whether it's right or wrong, but the reality is that in order to survive and prosper and go forward as a developer, there are several things you have to do now which you could have got away with not doing before," argues Jeffery. "You have to grow up and become a proper businessman. You can't go into a publisher and act like a spoilt teenager and demand money. It might have worked a few years ago with people like Ion Storm and whatever, but you have to go in there now and talk their language, and make a business proposition. You have to talk about unit sales, you have to talk about how you're going to market this thing, and why it will be an effective and competitive product. The reason for that is just that the stakes now are so high in terms of what you have to spend on development. If you look at the sales data, the market has become more and more of a hits market. There's a very small number of products making around 90 per cent of the sales."

Nevertheless, the position that Climax finds itself in affords the company the sort of opportunities that market realities deny smaller developers. "There is definitely a case for taking a leap of faith at certain points; there is room for creativity," asserts Jeffery. "What there's not room for is indulgence. We could create a game with *Warhammer* that's so niche and so inaccessible that it would be loved by the ultra-hardcore GW enthusiasts, but there's no point. You have to create something that has the depth, but also an ease of access. I'm not making a case for also-ran, churned-out games, I'm making a case for creative games that people really want to play. As gaming gets bigger and the stakes get higher, publishers are getting more conservative. But that leaves room for people like us, who are lucky enough to have the reserves and funding to invest in more risky stuff. We provide a middle layer between the small developer and the large publisher, and we can spend some money on something a bit creative, but something we believe will be reasonably successful. All the directors are gamers, we don't have any suits – apart from our accountant, who's kept in a room by himself. The loonies have finally got control of the asylum. Us loonies that started out as back-bedroom programmers making a few thousand quid for some Spectrum games have now finally grown up to where we're treated as peers by the publishing community, which is a wonderful thing."

Indeed – especially for those sweaty adolescents.







Photography: Martin Thompson

Inside…

Lost Boys

Founded in 2000, based in Amsterdam, with young, creative staff – not the sort of profile that normally fills investors with confidence. Purely in the interests of better understanding how Lost Boys intends to turn these factors to its advantage, Edge hops over to Holland

Judging from appearances, the lobby of the Tulip Inn, on Spuistraat in Amsterdam, is fairly typical as hotel lobbies go. But appearances can be deceiving:

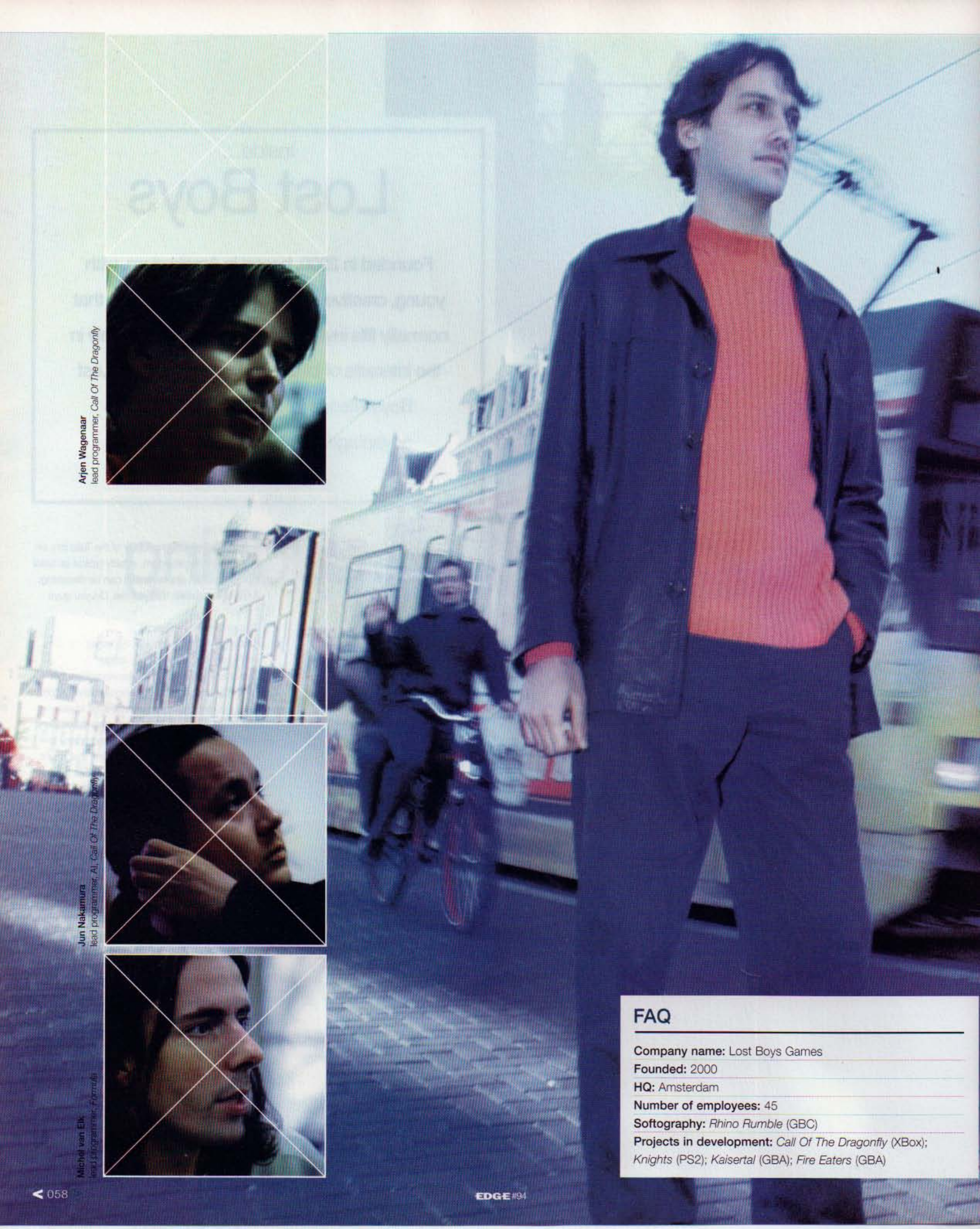
American tourist: "Excuse me. Do you guys party?"

Edge: "Why do you ask?"

American tourist: "I'm leaving today and I want to give away my drugs."

With this confirmation of preconceptions that inevitably accompany excursions to the Dutch capital ringing in **Edge**'s ears, it is off to see one of the country's few videogame developers, Lost Boys Games. However, the company is swift to confound any presumptions that might arise from the surrounding locale. While there is undoubtedly room in the videogame pantheon for developers like Mucky Foot, who rage against the corporate machine, Lost Boys is one of a growing number of small developers that are beginning to realise that one way of making it big is to strive towards commercial viability rather than towards originality merely for the sake of it. Having won approval from both Sony and Microsoft, it would appear that such an approach is paying dividends.

Like the strait-laced offspring of a hippie parent, the company eschews the bohemian ambience of the surrounding city, choosing instead to focus on making profitable games. "I honestly believe that we, the development community, should stop seeing publishers as some kind of necessary evil that stifles creativity and are an obstacle to original games coming to the market," explains commercial director **Martin de Ronde**. "If you fail to convince the marketing people you shouldn't condemn them for only being interested in licences and sequels. These people look at what will sell in the market. If you can't convince them, what gives you the right to say that they stifle creativity? If you have



Arjen Wagenaar
lead programmer, *Call Of The Dragonfly*

Jun Nakamura
lead programmer, AI, *Call Of The Dragonfly*

Michel van Eik
lead programmer, *Formula*

FAQ

Company name: Lost Boys Games
Founded: 2000
HQ: Amsterdam
Number of employees: 45
Softography: *Rhino Rumble* (GBC)
Projects in development: *Call Of The Dragonfly* (XBox); *Knights* (PS2); *Kaisertal* (GBA); *Fire Eaters* (GBA)

a prototype that shows the strength of your concept, then it will shine through."

Indeed, as he goes on to point out, innovation and high production values are useful prerequisites for commercial success. "Our main aim is to create product that has potential to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. If you're competing in the massmarket, you've got more competitors and you need to stand out. So you have to be innovative, and you have to look at your production values." A nice concomitant to this approach is that it helps the company attract the talent that it needs to fulfil its ambitions. "My personal belief," de Ronde continues, "is that if you strive for commercial success and just target the massmarket without thinking about high production values and innovation, then you'll have people working for your company that have to produce substandard games, and people want to work on next-generation titles with high production values. The philosophy of not giving people a factory feeling has pulled in staff who have come from companies where that's not the case."

Red-light reputation

Of course, the company's location in one of the continent's more infamously bacchanalian capitals may also help, but this does have certain disadvantages, not least in conjuring images of a more louche outfit. "There's no such thing as a Dutch development community, so you have to prove to publishers that there is Dutch talent. There's a lot of industry experience within the company, since we have people who've worked for Bitmap Brothers, Bullfrog, and we've got somebody who worked on 'The Matrix' – so there's a lot of experience, but the people that we do business with need to change their mindset. We had to work really hard to get rid of the prejudices, which I don't blame anyone for."

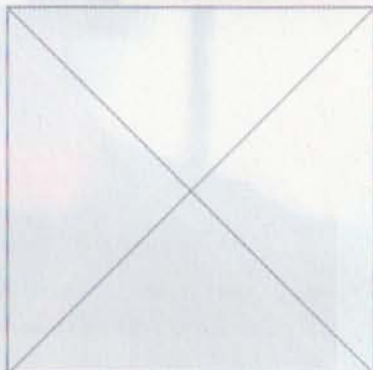
Certainly the company is endeavouring to correct such misconceptions, and is hard at work on several 128bit titles – again, with market realities at the forefront of consideration. "We are trying to work on projects that will more or less reflect the state of the market when we launch those products, so the majority of our titles are PS2 titles and we've got one XBox title. The publishers that we speak to are not interested in Dreamcast." While the company is not yet ready to talk about one of its PS2 projects to be published by SCEE, the other title in development for the platform is *Knights*, which is to be published by German company SWING! Entert@inment at the end of the year. Essentially a platform game featuring reams of minigames – many with a retro-tinged hue – de Ronde and producer David Lazarus hope that the pun-filled plot, featuring the kingdom of Whyrule, and some impressive physics courtesy of Havok, will distinguish it from similar titles.

More interesting, perhaps, given the recent unveiling of XBox at CES, is *Call Of The Dragonfly*. On the surface, this fits neatly into the stealth/action popularised by *Metal Gear Solid*, but with Kojima-san's sequel whetting the appetite of anyone who has caught an early glimpse, what features will distinguish this lesser known project? Apart from a gameplay hook that, if got right, will give the

"If you're competing in the massmarket, you've got more competitors and you need to stand out. So you have to be innovative"

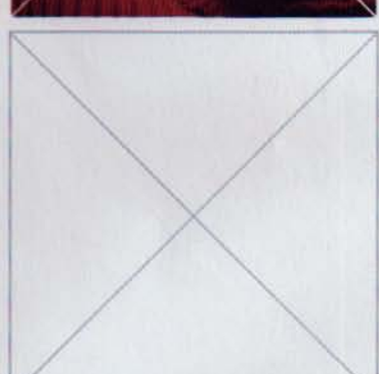


One of the first titles to appear from Lost Boys Games will be *Knights* on PlayStation2 (above). Ostensibly a fairly straightforward platformer, a host of retro-themed minigames should enhance its longterm appeal



Doug Walker
lead artist, *Call Of The Dragonfly*

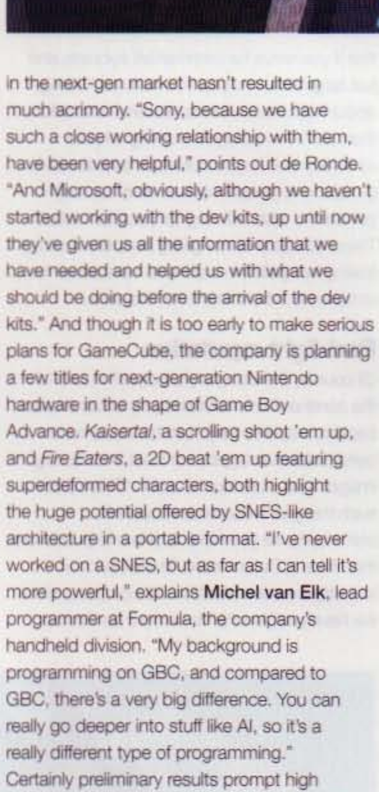




Martin de Ronde
commercial director



Mathijs de Jonge
lead artist, Formula







This early prototype demo of *Call Of The Dragonfly* goes some way to show off the technical capabilities of XBox, but there is still a long way to go for the title



formula a much-needed reworking for next-generation hardware, de Ronde highlights three areas: "The AI, the impact of the graphics on the gameplay, and, finally, the storyline." As lead artist **Doug Walker** explains, a professional writer is taking care of the plot. "Drawing an influence from films like 'Terminator' and 'Aliens', there's a strong female figure who is pregnant with a messiah-like foetus implanted with nanotechnology, which endows her with special powers, but which also threatens to destroy her." Although the project was still at pre-pitch stage when **Edge** viewed the demo, the AI system, being worked on by Jun Nakamura, also looks promising, and it doesn't look like gameplay will be sacrificed in the interest of realism. But as lead programmer **Arjen Wagenaar** points out: "The advantages of the XBox are especially graphics-wise and speed-wise. And the APIs that you use are documented really well; it's been around for years so there's lots of example code, and that helps out. The unified architecture should also help." It therefore comes as no surprise that the title is certainly visually impressive at this early stage.

Swinging both ways

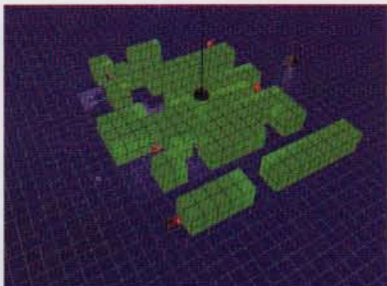
Surprisingly, working on projects for fierce rivals in the next-gen market hasn't resulted in much acrimony. "Sony, because we have such a close working relationship with them, have been very helpful," points out de Ronde. "And Microsoft, obviously, although we haven't started working with the dev kits, up until now they've given us all the information that we have needed and helped us with what we should be doing before the arrival of the dev kits." And though it is too early to make serious plans for GameCube, the company is planning a few titles for next-generation Nintendo hardware in the shape of Game Boy Advance. *Kaisertal*, a scrolling shoot 'em up, and *Fire Eaters*, a 2D beat 'em up featuring superdeformed characters, both highlight the huge potential offered by SNES-like architecture in a portable format. "I've never worked on a SNES, but as far as I can tell it's more powerful," explains **Michel van Elk**, lead programmer at Formula, the company's handheld division. "My background is programming on GBC, and compared to GBC, there's a very big difference. You can really go deeper into stuff like AI, so it's a really different type of programming." Certainly preliminary results prompt high hopes that both titles will boast the type of retro-flavoured, addictive gameplay that the

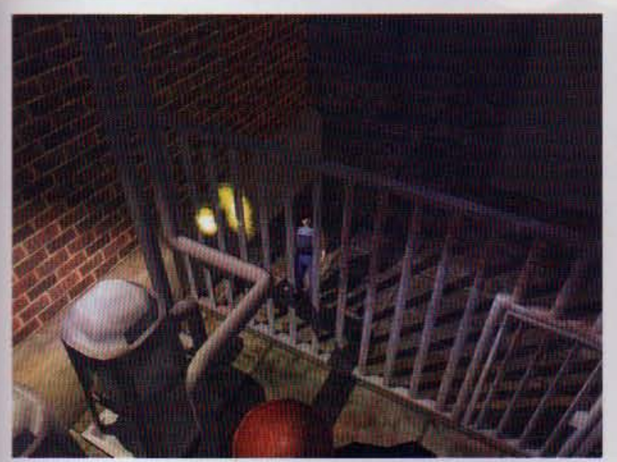




The platforming action of *Knights* will be enhanced by Havok's physics engine, which will utilise the power of PlayStation2 to increase the interactivity and the scope of behaviour of other agents within the game







Metal Gear Solid is an obvious point of reference for *Call Of The Dragonfly*, but with the superior lighting effects of Microsoft's console, the gameplay should be qualitatively different. A supernatural element stemming from nanotechnology also adds spice to proceedings



hardware has made possible.

At the other end of the scale, though, is the team working on cross-platform engine technology which can be used in all the company's projects. The good news for the second PlayStation2 title in development is that this team is getting to grips with the idiosyncratic architecture of the platform to obtain strong visual results. One approach that has seen some success, judging by an early demo of a human head shown to **Edge**, is using small textures layered on top of one another, as lead programmer **Michiel Ouwehand** illustrates. "Normally you would take an entire face, map it to 256x256 and then draw the beard in there. When you get up close it starts to blur out. We have a very low-resolution map of where the beard is, which will be interpolated. You blend this map with smaller textures to provide the detail of the beard. Although the textures are very small, if you add them all together the effect is amazing and the graphics chip is so fast that it doesn't matter how much you draw."

Of course, the advantage of having a dedicated team responsible for engine technology is that another potential revenue stream is added to the company's repertoire. "The main advantage of the engine is that it is strong in every area, and we designed it with all kinds of games in mind. Most of the engines that are on the market nowadays have come from one particular genre," explains de Ronde, although he does concede that this has certain commercial benefits. "With the track record of a game like *Unreal* or *Quake*, the engines aren't solely being used by developers to avoid having to develop the technology themselves, but also as a marketing decision to sell the finished product. That's something we have to compete with if we want to license our product. On the one hand we've got the competitive advantage of a flexible engine which supports various game genres, but on the other hand we still have to wait until next year to have a game behind it."

It is clearly early days for Lost Boys Games, but that isn't stopping it from having big ideas about the way the industry should work. De Ronde sums up: "What we need to do is focus on our craft. We need to focus on the way we design games, we need to create a common vocabulary for the design of games so that we can come up with new concepts, and we need to look at the production process itself as a management issue. We need to ensure that the original design concept is as close as possible to the finished product." **Edge** is the first to admire industry creatives who seek only to push back the boundaries of game design, but given the recent difficulties presented by a transitional year, such a clear-headed approach is laudable in its own right.





Kaisertal is still very early in development, but is a good advert for the kind of things that gamers can expect from Nintendo's Game Boy Advance when it is launched. Set to be ready for the first couple of months after the handheld launches, this solid rendition of a vertically scrolling shoot 'em up dynamic points to a genre that could be set for a revival thanks to the unit's SNES-like architecture



Dr Henry Jenkins, director of comparative media studies at MIT



The challenge of how to determine the best way to separate product aimed at younger players from that aimed at adults is one that every medium has faced at one point or another

pretending, in short, that they sleep in their polygonal clothes?

According to **Dr Henry Jenkins**, director of comparative media studies at MIT, the videogame industry will soon be forced to determine how best to separate out games aimed at younger players from those aimed at adults. "This is a challenge that every medium has faced at one point or another," he says, "and I think games are rapidly reaching that point."

But isn't there a rating system in place, and isn't it working? That depends on who you ask – and, indeed, on the country they live in. In the US, for example, videogame regulation is at a more advanced stage than in the UK. As such, the situation on the other side of the Atlantic represents an interesting glimpse of what the future may hold for European gamers, and is worthy of closer inspection.

It took the Senate hearings of 1993 to get the industry in the US to organise itself under the Interactive Digital Software Association and ultimately establish the Entertainment Software Ratings Board in 1994. Now, more than six years later, the government still isn't pleased with the game industry. In the wake of the Columbine shootings and national concern about violence marketed to kids, the Federal Trade Commission conducted a study on violent entertainment marketed to children. The report, released last September, states that of the 118 electronic games with a Mature (M) rating for violence that were selected for the FTC study, 83 of them, a full 70 per cent, were marketed at children under the age of 17 – in fact, the marketing plans for 60 titles expressly included children under 17 in their target audience. The FTC's surveys also showed that unaccompanied children aged 13 to 16 were able to buy M-rated games in 85 per cent of the 380 stores visited.

Certainly this is a cause for concern. Yet the IDSA reports that 97 per cent of people who purchase computer games and 87 per cent of those who purchase console games are indeed 18 years or older – and of those under 18 who purchase games, 84 per cent get their parents' permission.





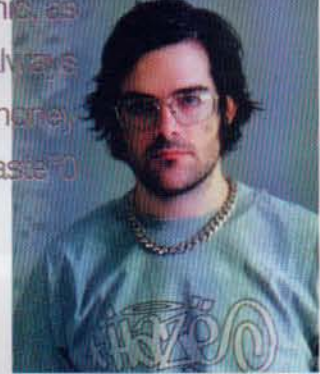
Diverse content to come

Any head of videogame development will tell you something pretty similar to what Rockstar Games president **Sam Houser** has to say: in the next few years technology will enable a wider diversity of interactive content for consoles. "This will result in some games that strive to be horrifically violent or pornographic," Houser says, "as people will always try to make money out of willful bad taste."

Still, it's doubtful (in the console space, at least) that hardware manufacturers would approve of much violence and pornography. All PlayStation2, XBox, Dreamcast, and GameCube licensees must submit their products to each system's manufacturer for approval. It's a rigid procedure in which the hardware manufacturers can have a product killed at any time, without reason.

There are, however, a few

"In the next few years technology will enable a wider diversity of interactive content for consoles, which will result in some games that strive to be horrifically violent or pornographic, as people will always try to make money out of bad taste"



Rockstar Games president Sam Houser wants to develop titles for older gamers







Resident Evil Code: Veronica (above) raised the stakes in terms of videogame horror, and Interplay looks set to do likewise in 2001 with *Run Like Hell* (left)

loopholes. 'Adult video' company Vivid Entertainment has already announced plans to expand its business to DVD-based game devices and to develop interactive DVDs that work through the PS2's DVD movie-playback system. As these products will work in any DVD player and won't tap the power of the PS2's proprietary chipset, Vivid's questionably 'interactive' products do not require Sony's approval – reason enough why Vivid's **Eric Regan** wasn't too shy to explain to a videogame trade magazine last August that: "The type of consumers who will initially buy PS2 are young males of ages between 18 and 35. That exactly fits our target market."

Porn vendors aside, by and large traditional videogame publishers think more like Houser. "Games should create an immersive environment that players can lose themselves in," he says. "Some environments, the criminal underworld being an obvious one, necessitate a certain amount of profanity, violence, and humour to create any illusion of immersiveness."

Houser talks the talk, and Rockstar has walked the walk. Maintaining the vision of *Grand Theft Auto* actually cost the company some sales when it shipped its M-rated PlayStation version. According to Houser, this PlayStation version never received full distribution in a number of countries, including the US.

"The game was about criminals," Houser explains. "Criminals can, and sometimes do, swear. The swearing or profanity in the game was much less than in many films or any episode of 'The Sopranos', but there remains this ludicrous perception that games are purely for kids, and these same kids never watch TV or movies – that somehow we need to be judged by

different rules."

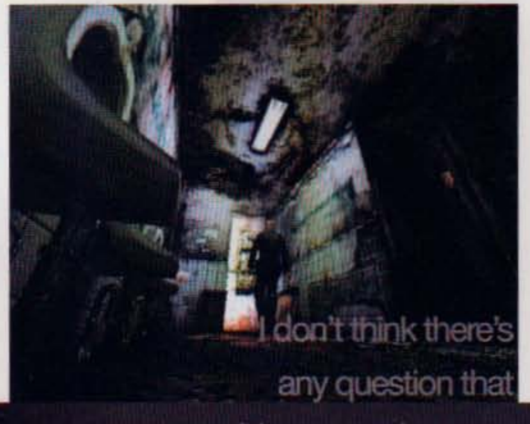
With *Grand Theft Auto 2*, the PlayStation version was the lead platform, and Rockstar wanted full distribution for this sequel – the company felt the game deserved it. So, for *GTA2* Rockstar dropped the gratuitous swear words, and the game received a Teen (T) rating on PlayStation.

"We submitted it expecting an M," Houser says, "and the ESRB told us the climate had changed since the original was released and they couldn't justify giving it a Mature rating. We don't feel that we had to make compromises in the content of the game – nor would we ever do that. We just designed it more intelligently for the US PlayStation market. The PC version was aimed at a slightly older audience, and the developer, DMA Design, allowed a little more of their dark humour to come through, so it received the [Mature] rating from the ESRB."

While most developers usually start with an audience in mind for their game, some games receive ratings their developers didn't expect. "I was surprised with the M-rating verdict," says *Giants* designer **Nick Bruty**. "We designed *Giants* to be thoroughly entertaining for gamers like us, and, while we push some boundaries, the game is always comic in tone – never malicious in content. It's hard for me to judge which age is appropriate for *Giants*. That's somebody else's field, but I do feel it doesn't belong in the Mature category."







Silent Hill 2 (above) has the ability to genuinely terrify the player, building up an increasingly uncomfortable ambience as the game progresses

Criticism to come

As the videogame market expands its audience, it will likely continue to draw criticism from technophobes and critics. The proof, unfortunately, is in the Columbine tragedy.

"I don't think there's any question that videogames became a media scapegoat in the post-Columbine era," says Jenkins. "I think that there was an enormous anxiety within the culture about digital media in general. Computers were not a central part of the lives of the current generation of parents when they were growing up, but they are a central part of the lives of their children."

According to Jenkins, this 'digital gap' produces enormous anxiety, because parents often don't know what's going on when their kids are connected to digital media. Jenkins specifically remembers the week after the Columbine shooting when *The Washington Post* asked the general public what they thought was a significant cause of the shooting. The top answer was the Internet (82 per cent), while the availability of guns was cited by less than 60 per cent of respondents, suggesting that more Americans were afraid of their children's access to digital technology than about their access to semi-automatic rifles. It shouldn't take a professor from MIT to see that something was fundamentally out of sorts with the way the American publi responded, but Jenkins does get to the root of the problem.

"The culture warriors," says Jenkins, "the David Grossmans, the Joseph Liebermans were the mos successful in mobilising public opinion – sort of exploiting people's fear in the wake of Columbine. And the result is they were far more effective than, say, gun control advocates in getting public policy discussions started in the wake of that."

While the videogame industry suffered a rather embarrassing public slap from the massmedia, videogames were not, in Jenkins' opinion, the real victim of Columbine backlash. "Real fear at the local level affected American teenagers," he says. "Parents became suspicious of their kids because of their engagement with computer games or [the Internet]. Teachers and principals put kids into therapy or punished them for their cultural taste. The videogame industry got some public humiliation, but high-school kids got put into therapy, suspended, and grounded. Long term, they're the ones who really paid the price."

Still, some gamers rose to the occasion and defended their interest in games. One case in particular was cited in a *Rolling Stone* article published last November. New Jersey teenager **Joe Stavitsky** responded to an essay in *Harper's* magazine that attacked videogames. "I can tell you none of us play videogames to learn how (or why) to shoot people," Stavitsky writes. "For us, videogames do not cause violence; they prevent it. We see games as a perfectly safe release from a physically violent reaction to the daily abuse levelled at us."

"I don't think there's any question that videogames became a media scapegoat in the post-Columbine era. I think that there was an enormous anxiety within the culture about digital media in general"

Not just childsplay

The majority of individuals involved in game development are understandably vexed with the public's notion that games are strictly childsplay.

"There seems to be this perception that electronic entertainment is only for kids," says **Travis Williams**, a producer at Interplay. "People couldn't be more wrong." Williams isn't interested in creating games for the younger set, and he isn't alone. "As we game makers get older," he says, "so do our tastes. We are merely speaking to others who are as old as we are."

Formerly a producer for the now-defunct ASC games, Williams was responsible for the extremely creepy, literary, and unfortunately overlooked PC adventure *Sanitarium*. Now he and developer Digital Mayhem are hard at work on *Run Like Hell*, a survival horror game published by Interplay for PlayStation2. While he admits that all games aren't necessarily made with specific ratings in mind, "there was a point," Williams says about *Run Like Hell*, "where we threw our hands up and said you just can't have an effective survival horror game if you choose 'the lighter side of terror'. I wouldn't want to buy that game, so I sure as hell wouldn't want to make it."

Considering the success of the *Resident Evil* series and its appeal among the older set, Williams is probably right in his assertion that if he targets a younger audience or brings anything 'less scary' to the table, his game isn't going to sell. "*Run Like Hell* is being designed for all the people who are tired of zombies," he says. "The monsters are faster and deadlier, and if we have done our jobs correctly, it should be extremely scary. I wouldn't recommend it to a younger gamer."

One look at a screenshot makes it clear that *Run Like Hell* isn't meant for kiddies. However, given the way the general public often equates videogames with children's toys, there are games that send mixed messages. Case in point: *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. The game's characters visually project the same family-friendly design found in a Disney or Mario game, yet it features strong sexual innuendo, profanity, and extreme violence. Conker, the star squirrel, even drinks beer and urinates on his enemies.

Obviously, the juxtaposition is the joke – similar to a Muppets skit that aired on 'The Jim Henson Hour' in 1989. In the sketch, Muppet bunnies, spoofing a 'Rambo' movie trailer, pulled out M-60s and headbands and began blasting away at hunters and wolves. (The tagline? Cute has learned to kill!) However, at a time when many culture watchdogs already see games as something of a Trojan horse, such a product may be ill-advised.

"We have to recognise that much of the Senate and other moral reformers are humour-deprived," Jenkins responds. "They don't recognise hyperbole; they don't recognise irony; they don't recognise black comedy when they see it. And I think that's part of the problem: there is enormous literalisation that takes place when you get into one of those Congressional hearing rooms. Having said that, there probably is a danger at the present moment of choosing to develop content that blurs the line between the childlike in appearance and the adult in content."

Still, *Conker* is due out early this year, and Nintendo is firmly behind it, which brings us back to our current dilemma. Can the game industry better ensure that parents know what they're buying, and can it influence just how effective the ESRB ratings are? While many in the industry, like Bruty, feel that the Teen and Mature ratings are too broad, most also understand the politics involved





While many developers are genuinely attempting to produce titles for mature gamers, games like *Blade* (above) seem to have included 'adult' themes in a bid for advertising and sales on shock value alone

and – publicly, at least – work to support the ESRB.

More importantly, though, practically everyone agrees that once a title receives its rating, that's where the game-maker's responsibility should end. "I have no idea how many consumers use the rating system as part of their criteria for buying a game," says Williams. "I know some parents buy games and have no idea what's depicted inside. I don't think that's the industry's fault – we have a rating system. I think that's mum or dad's fault."

"I know some parents buy games and have no idea what's depicted inside. I don't think that's the industry's fault – we have a rating system. I think that's mum or dad's fault"

Educating the masses

Since its inception, the ESRB has rated more than 7,000 games, but the group hasn't been particularly successful building awareness for its ratings. The FTC's May-June 2000 survey of parents and children reports 61 per cent of parents were aware of a videogames rating system, but only 37 per cent had more than slight familiarity with what the ratings meant.

The ESRB intends to change this with an awareness campaign that it launched over the Christmas holiday season, when as much as 50 per cent of the year's videogames are sold. The campaign includes magazine advertisements and televised public

> "It's important to understand that the ratings are a guide, not a law. If we deny somebody the right to purchase a game, there may be some legal ramifications. It's not like minors purchasing firearms or tobacco, where there's a law in place"

service announcements starring Tiger Woods. Retail chains have also committed to the awareness campaign. Toys 'R' Us, K-Mart, Target, and Wal-Mart have instituted a register for M-rated games to help ensure they are not sold to children under 17. Many more national chains will begin displaying ESRB educational materials such as brochures, posters, and shelf cards in stores nationwide.

"We go through a very extensive educational process with our employees," explains **Jeffrey Griffiths**, senior vice president of Electronics Boutique, "with classes and weekly information packages about game ratings and how to educate parents about the rating system. But it's important to understand that the ratings are a guide, not a law. If we deny somebody the right to purchase a game, there may be some legal ramifications. It's not like [minors] purchasing firearms or tobacco, where there's a law in place. We have to be careful not to impose on somebody's right to buy a game."

Although it's doubtful that EB's refusal to sell an adult-oriented game to a minor could result in legal repercussions, stranger cases have been won. The flexible policy probably stems from potential ill effects to the company image: If consumers got wind of a shop being 'unfriendly to kids', it could be a business disaster for a retailer. Still, Griffiths explains that EB salespeople go out of their way to make sure a game ends up in appropriate hands. If a child wants to purchase an M-rated game, the salesperson will point out the rating to the child, and check if there's a parent with the child to inform the parent of the adult content. After these options are exhausted and a minor still wants to buy an M-rated game, the corporate line is 'use your best judgement'.

"Nobody's perfect, but I'm comfortable with our employees' level of awareness about the ratings," says Griffiths. "It's much higher than the salespeople at mass-merchant stores, which don't have the familiarity with videogames that our employees do."

At the end of the day, Griffiths thinks retailers can only be responsible for educating their employees so they can help consumers make informed decisions. Ultimately, his opinion comes back to the one expressed by Travis Williams: it's the parents' responsibility to decide what is appropriate for their children.

Are ratings required?

In 1993, many gamers argued that the Senate made too much noise over the cartoonish, over-the-top violence of *Mortal Kombat*. But it's harder to make that same argument today, given the advances in technology that enable game designers to push the limits of realistic violence. *Soldier Of Fortune* specifically comes to mind as a game that captures the gritty, realistic essence of modern combat, doing it so well that even the most battle-hardened gamers can't help but squirm at the gore.

Doesn't the industry need ratings to alert unsuspecting consumers to this kind of content? Do the current ratings need to be better enforced? "Those are separate questions," Jenkins says. "It seems to me that ratings serve two potential functions. One is to educate parents and consumers about the content of material they are thinking about buying. The other is to regulate who has access to that content."

Jenkins believes the game industry's ratings are more detailed than film ratings, but the rating systems could be made more informative for parents looking to make meaningful purchasing decisions. To illustrate his point, he alludes back to film.

"As a parent," Jenkins says, "I could care less whether my son sees nudity on the screen. I am comfortable with the human body, and my moral standards with nudity are not a big



Soldier Of Fortune on the PC set new standards for the realistic representation of violence in videogames, sparking a vigorous debate on its release. The title is now on its way to PS2



Jenkins suggests rating games like *Sim City* (above) on their educational value, as well as on the basis of possible adult or violent content

issue. On the other hand, racism and sexism disturb me a great deal. However, the current movie ratings code would give an R or NC-17 rating to male frontal nudity, and a Disney film with a G rating can a have racially offensive stereotype embedded in it."

In Jenkins' worldview, a 'one size fits all' rating system isn't adequate given the range of questions parents want addressed. And as someone who believes in civil liberties, he's very worried about the enforcement side of that.

"What we may not need as a society," he says, "is a uniform set of moral standards that are enforced on all consumers. If we enforce the [current movie] rating systems, we've decided as a society that nudity is a problem for all children, and racism is not something worth putting the enforcement mechanism behind."

In Jenkins' view, the other downside to all current ratings systems is that the ratings are purely negative. They tell us whether or not certain potentially objectionable qualities are present in a product, but there are no positive elements cited. A product that might be educational gets no benefit that listing such content might add. "Conversely," says Jenkins, "games that receive an E rating for children can be banal, formulaic, stupid – and there's no penalty attached to that. They're all equally 'good' for kids."

The real irony that Jenkins likes to point out comes at the expense of our civic leaders who would push to enact ratings legislature. "Many of the people in Congress who would advocate a universal rating system," Jenkins says, "don't even believe we can come up with a national set of standards on math performance in the schools because that's such a local matter; it has to be left to local and state government. If we can't come up with nationally standard notions of what good math performance is, how can we realistically come up with national standards of what good culture is?"

Furthering the experience

As developers and publishers struggle with the new technology, concoct plans to go online, and decide which platforms are the right ones, it's not difficult to understand why the videogame industry as a community hasn't traditionally focused on widening its audience. But going forward, the rule will likely be this: failure to grow the experience for core players could result in the quick end of your company. Perhaps that's why Electronic Arts has actually hired Jenkins to give a workshop to the company's top creative people, specifically to work out issues of story- and character-building as they will apply to next-generation games.

The key is to grow the market by giving core players what they want without alienating them. Houser says Rockstar tapped a huge audience of game players over the age of 18 with *Grand Theft Auto*. "They want to play games in the environments and settings they witness in other media and art forms," Houser explains, "rather than the more traditional gaming environments – the cutesy Japanese bad acid trip or the Tolkien-inspired, dragon-infested land. However, all of the cool styling and adult content in the world cannot compensate for duff gameplay. People always sniff out a dud, no matter how cool its soundtrack or how controversial its subject matter."

This past holiday season, games came alive on the cover of everything from TV Guide to business/technology magazine Red Herring. The promise of new and powerful technology and the potential for online connectivity are finally capturing the attention of the world media – with a positive spin.

"I think we are at a moment when the games industry really needs to take assessment of what its medium is," says Jenkins, "and what its medium could become. You know, the technological breakthroughs that are going on right now open up an enormous space for new creativity and innovation."

Like film, books, and music, videogames have the potential to reflect the full range of human experience, including issues of violence, sexuality, and the emotional and ethical dimensions these issues evoke. At the moment games are still in a relatively primitive state of storytelling, and **Edge** fully expects that for a number of years to come they won't be particularly sophisticated in dealing with such subject matter. But to be fair, many films and most television shows these days also deal with such mature subject matter in a pretty adolescent fashion, too.

Jenkins is optimistic, however: "I think there is an enormous amount of intelligence and creativity in the games community that is waiting for the opportunity to push deeper into this medium. I think if the industry is willing to take leadership on that, there's real potential that can be achieved in games in the coming decade."

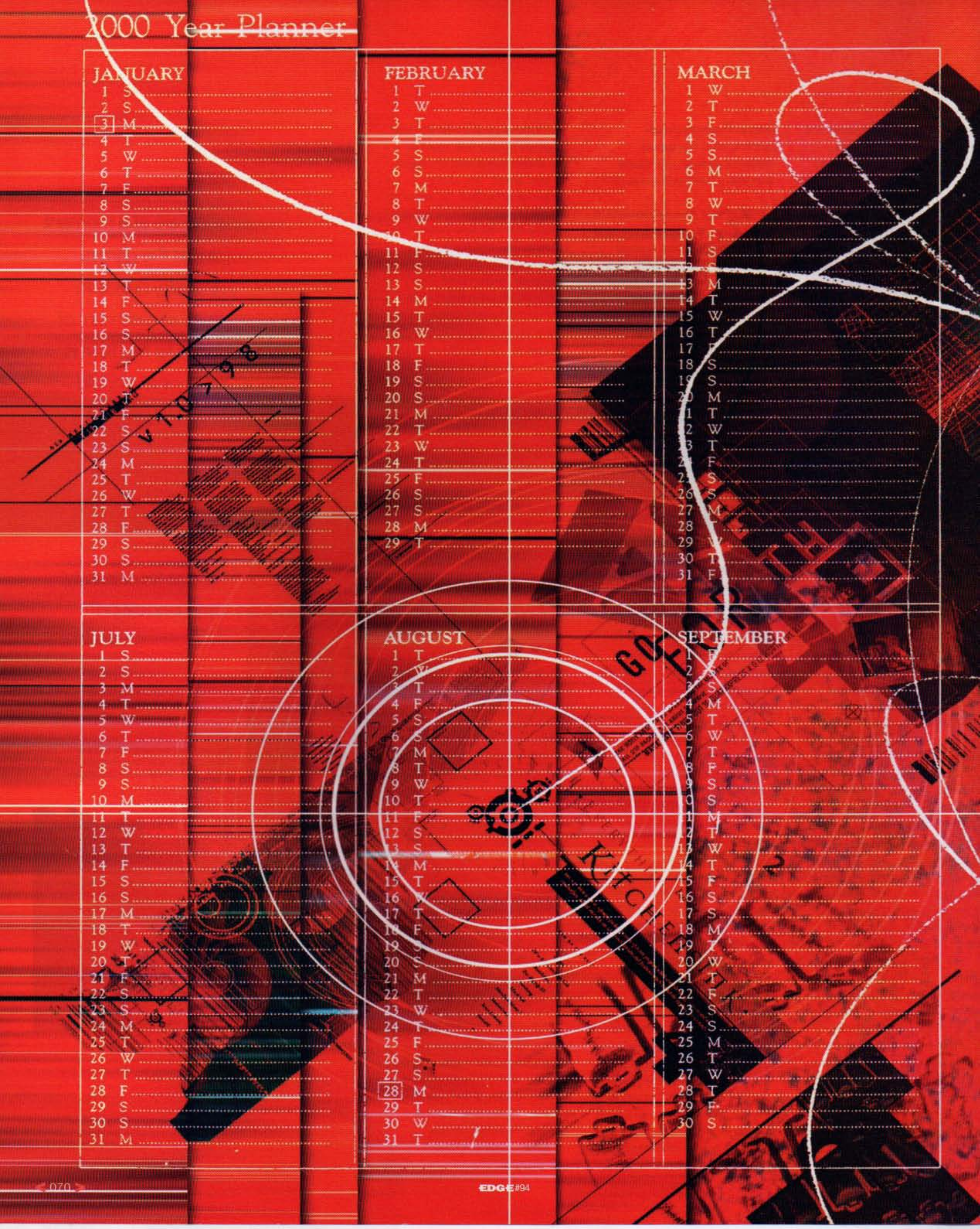
Edge hopes that it doesn't take that long.

"We are at a moment when the games industry needs to take assessment of what its medium is, and what it could become. The technological breakthroughs that are going on open up an enormous space for creativity and innovation"



The power of PlayStation2 is enabling developers to create some truly gruesome effects, as in *Onimusha* (left and below)




2000 Year Planner
JANUARY
FEBRUARY
MARCH
JULY
AUGUST
SEPTEMBER

Game over

Sony launched new hardware. Nintendo and Microsoft announced theirs. The second millennium truly ended. Edge looks back on 12 months in the development of e-entertainment's coming of age...

JANUARY

THE INDUSTRY

With PS2 due in Japan for March and the west during autumn, 2000 is regarded by many as make-or-break for Sega. The general consensus of opinion appears to be that Sony can hardly fail to succeed; by contrast, Sega will struggle with industry cynicism and consumer apathy alike. Nintendo seems poised to spend the year in virtual repose, dreaming of Dolphin and Game Boy Advance while wrapped up safely in a Pikachu-branded duvet. Microsoft, meanwhile, has much to prove and, indeed, announce – some anticipate a late-2000 launch for the bundle of conjecture referred to as XBox. Dreamcast enters 2000 having enjoyed a reasonable (but hardly spectacular) Christmas, when it was easily eclipsed at a canter by the cheap, truly massmarket PlayStation. There are rumours that Sega Europe chief JF Cecillon will leave the company, although these are soon quashed. More ominous is the relative apathy demonstrated by the Japanese market for the machine. It's unfair to describe *Shenmue* as a disappointment, but it clearly hasn't make the impact – at retail, at very least – that SOJ might have hoped for over Christmas. January proves equally underwhelming for the title, as it competes with the quirky *Seaman* for punter plaudits and sales. Waning enthusiasm within the development and publishing communities – which had not, to be brutally frank, ever bordered upon the ecstatic – suggests that Sega might face a worrying shortfall of games in 2001. Conversely, the Japanese rollout for PlayStation2 in March promises a near-surfeit of thirdparty titles.

Sony initiates a ban on unauthorised use of PlayStation logos and trademarks. Those hit by the decision are peripheral

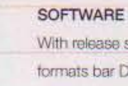
31 MONDAY (31–335)

manufacturers and magazine publishers; the latter are forced to drop the magic word from their covers. Infogrames announces its decision to dissolve the GTI brand after acquiring the ailing publisher late in 1999, and few eyebrows are raised. After all, the industry is obviously accreting into a handful of superpowers – but, although everyone is probably too satiated and spent after Christmas excesses to fight them off, EA and Infogrames conspicuously fail to buy everyone and be done with it. In **Edge**, there's news that VM Labs' Nuon chip for DVD players is ready to roll. *Legend Of* 110,000 before its first week on sale is through. Sega's top title for January, *Virtua Striker 2*, barely crosses the 10,000 mark. Dreamcast owners can derive a modicum of solace during a virtually release-free month from the news that a *Tomb Raider* game is coming to their machine – albeit merely a port of *The Last Revelation*. Eidos will increase its commitment to Sega with conversions of Quantic Dreams' *The Nomad Soul* and Crystal Dynamics' *Soul Reaver*; the company also bags the rights to publish *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* in the UK. This is mystifying, given previous reports that with pundits confident of a September appearance in Europe.

{ *Ocarina Of Time* is awarded the honour of being the Best Videogame Ever, with *Mario 64* and *GoldenEye* bagging second and third place }

1 TUESDAY (32–334)

Zelda: Ocarina Of Time is awarded the honour of being the Best Videogame Ever, with *Mario 64* and *GoldenEye* bagging second and third place respectively.



The best videogame ever created? So said **Edge**'s top 100 games feature in January 2000

2 WEDNESDAY (33–333)

SOFTWARE

With release schedules suggesting all formats bar Dreamcast will rely upon safe, established IP and licences with alarming (but inevitable) regularity, it's perhaps fitting that *FIFA 2000* continues to dominate retail throughout January. Adding to its pre-Christmas success, the title climbs relentlessly towards the 500,000 sales mark. For all its manifold flaws, however, *FIFA*'s success is positively pleasing when set against the mess that is *Tomorrow Never Dies* (2/10). Panned by critics prior to its late-'99 launch, it remains a major player during January after a bewilderingly profitable festive season – although, in publisher EA's defence, *Medal of Honor* (8/10) is deservedly popular. *Tomb Raider*, Judy to *FIFA*'s Punch during the Yuletide spending spree and now a firm institution, is also a contender in its *Last Revelation* (8/10) guise. *Donkey Kong Country* (N64, 8/10) is revealed to be a Christmas success for Rare – despite an intimidating RRP of $60 (£41), it takes the US top spot.

The industry shakes off its post-millennial hangover with the release of *Gran Turismo 2* (9/10), the first bona fide Y2K hit. Launching at the end of the month, the game attains sales figures of more than SOJ did all the legwork (and made a substantial investment) during its development. It and *Crazy Taxi* can't arrive soon enough, though. Dreamcast's winter and spring release schedule, predominantly a patchwork of ports and shovelware, looks threadbare. Worse, the planned rollout of online gaming looks set to slip further into the year.

HARDWARE

Sony's second console launch is poised for worldwide domination, while Microsoft and Nintendo are due to officially announce new machines during some point in 2000. The putative XBox will almost certainly use an NVidia chip of some description, representing yet another snub of sorts for the once-dominant 3dfx from the videogame industry. There's little news on the subject of Dolphin, but Game Boy Advance is expected to hit stores before Christmas. "We can expect it to arrive here in October or November at £90-£125," says **Dick Francis** of UK Nintendo distributor THE Games. Although it's likely that Rare is privy to its secrets, interested codeshops grumble that dev kits for the handheld have yet to arrive.

Barring anything short of a miracle from Sega, or an unlikely Ratneresque suicide from Sony, 2000 looks set to be PlayStation2's year. Early speculation that its Japanese debut will be delayed are soon scotched. It will launch on March 4 in Japan,

FEBRUARY

INDUSTRY

Predictably, publishers who had a lean Christmas begin to use the word 'transitional' with notable regularity. With the obvious exception of the Japanese gaming superpowers, EA and Infogrames, almost everyone looks vulnerable. There are talks of a merger between Activision and T*HQ – two middleweights with heavyweight aspirations – while the Russian doll effect continues apace with the closure of Pysgnosis's US office. Sony says that it has no intention to can the veteran brand, but it's a sorry tale, some lament; yet another UK publisher looks set to become little more than an in-house development studio. With expensive PS2 development to fund, it's a relief for publishers that the PlayStation and, to a lesser extent, PC markets still look relatively healthy. The N64 and Dreamcast, however, represent a big risk: games on these formats either seem to perform well, or sink without trace, with February seeing both continue to underperform. Unsurprisingly, support for the N64 continues to evaporate as codeshops look towards forthcoming consoles – Dreamcast's fortunes also seem far from secure.

Former DMA boss David Jones joins Rage to set up two new studios in Edinburgh and Dundee; another industry veteran, erstwhile DID founder Martin Kenwright, reappears with start-up Evolution. Sony may publish Evolution's first game, a racing title for PS2. In the issue dated February, **Edge** picks its tips for the top in 2000 – and inclusion is almost like a kiss of death. Excuse the clumsy nature of the following litany of lateness, but *Black & White*, *Republic: The Revolution*, *Galleon*, *Team Fortress*, *Commandos 2*, *The Bouncer*, *GT2000*, and *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee*, among others, are all cited as certain hits for the year ahead. Of those mentioned here, *The Bouncer* gets closest to shipping, but that's another story.

SOFTWARE

At its PlayStation2 Festival event at the Makuhari Messe Convention Centre in

2000

JAN

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Feb/March

WEEK 9 2000

28 Tokyo: Sony offers a clearer view of its PS2 launch titles. Naturally, most of the name titles on display are sequels; the idealistic (or simply naive) hoping for unfettered, unrestrained creativity on the new format are disappointed. There are 500 demo pods with 27 titles to play, few of which even approach the quality of aesthetic achievement mooted for the console during 1999. *Ridge Racer V*, *Tekken Tag Tournament*, *FIFA 2000*, *GT2000* and *Street Fighter EX 3* turn heads, but offer little more than technically superior reiterations of established gameplay mechanics. The future of electronic entertainment, as is so often the case, proves to be a prettier reworking of its past. There's a minor moment of controversy at the show, as Tecmo announces that *Dead Or Alive 2* will

29 make its debut on the PS2 – and not, as was understood, on Dreamcast. The DC version will still hit the west first, but this is scant consolation: it's the Japanese market that cares about the title most. On a more positive note, Sega announces titles from LucasArts, exciting newcomers Illusion Softworks and Lionhead, with ports of, in turn, *Episode One: Racer*, *Hidden & Dangerous* and *Black & White* (with, pleasingly, online play supported). The latter, predictably, will be published by Sega – EA's estrangement with Dreamcast continues. Valve's *Half-Life* is also pencilled in for November, and it will feature dial-up deathmatches.

1 Once again, Dreamcast game sales are rather unexceptional, with *Shadowman* (8/10) and *Virtua Striker 2* making slight dents in the charts. For the PlayStation, *GT2* continues to perform well after creating £4m of revenue during its first week on sale, with *Toy Story 2*, *Resident Evil: Nemesis* and *FIFA 2000* accountable for the beeping of many an EPOS terminal. *The Sims*, *Delta Force 2*, and *Championship Manager* are PC favourites, but probably the most significant software arrival of the month is *Pokémon*. Both *Red* and *Blue* are released – they promptly occupy the upper reaches of certain spreadsheet documents throughout the retail sector, where they will remain for the rest of the year.

HARDWARE

More XBox gossip circulates – it will be branded with the Microsoft logo, have a DVD-ROM drive (and play movies), 64Mb RAM, a 4Gb hard drive, and a processor of up to 1GHz. Bill Gates is expected to announce the console formally at the Game Developers Conference in San Jose in March. More interesting than the mooted tech specs, however, are reports that Microsoft will introduce a royalty system that undercuts that of Sony – but it's unlikely that the finished machine will see the light of day before Spring 2001. With Game Boy Color flying from shelves, speculation mounts that Nintendo will delay Game Boy Advance until after Christmas in the west. The N64's future in the UK looks gloomy as *Perfect Dark* is delayed until June – but, with a Pokémon game on the cards for later this year, few are prepared to dismiss the prospect of an Indian summer.

As anticipated, retail figures begin to call for Sega to drop the RRP of the Dreamcast to boost ailing sales. JF Cecillon is reportedly annoyed as certain German stores take the matter into their own hands, dropping its price-point from Dm499 (£160) to Dm399 (£125). Cecillon also announces that Sega has achieved 700,000 pan-European sales since the introduction of the DC, with 200,000 users having registered for its Dreamarena online service. On paper, this makes Sega one of Europe's fastest-growing ISPs. Observers are quick to point out that registration occurs the first time people go online with Dreamcast, and that regular user figures, if available, may well be significantly smaller. The announcement of the Dreameye camera/microphone combo is interesting – the applications of the two devices are manifold – but how effective can they be with a 33.6K modem? In Japan, there are problems with PS2's backwards compatibility – Sony is investigating, but the clock is ticking. Apropos of the historical significance, pundits decide that September 29 is the date for PS2's UK arrival – exactly five years to the day after the appearance of its predecessor.

MARCH

INDUSTRY

Sony announces its decision to revise its royalty structure in the UK. There will now be more price points for publishers to choose from, rather than the standard model of full-price or Platinum. For the punter, this is fantastic news: it means cheaper games. Predictably, though, there are rumbles of discontent from retail (with a degree of hypocrisy after their fierce discounting wars of 1999), including underperforming toy retailer Beatties, which blames falling game prices as a major factor in the company's financial woes. Naturally, the larger publishers predict that the end of the world is nigh, as shelves will be choked with £10 shovelware. Still, it'll make a change from £35 shovelware, right? In a separate development, the Office of Fair Trading's Competition Act is due to come into effect, designed to ensure that small retailers are treated fairly by distributors and suppliers. This could help level the playing field for indie games stores in their attempts to compete with major chains.

Lost Toys, staffed by former Bullfrog workers, has its first game, *MoHo*, signed by Take 2; Sony acquires Martin Kenwright's PS2 driving game, as expected. Sadly, Pumpkin Studios, producer of the enjoyable (yet commercially sterile) *Warzone 2100* has the plug pulled by owners Eidos, with 21 jobs lost. Meanwhile, DMA Design is to go through a 'consolidation process', relocating from Dundee to Edinburgh at the behest of owner Take 2. Much of the company's best talent chooses to seek alternative employment, but Take 2 insists the label will not be canned – the irony of which will not escape veteran **Edge** readers. A number of publishers announce financial results. Infogrames posts a profit; Interplay, Acclaim and Sega of Japan post losses, the latter being to the tune of $411m (£278m). Acclaim blames the N64 for its problems, but, positively, announces PS2 titles – including two driving games with Ferrari licences. The Eidos share price drops, and Sega learns that Konami – while announcing substantial support for PS2, Game Boy Advance and XBox – is to reduce its already meagre DC lineup, with *Castlevania Resurrection* put on 'indefinite hold'.

SOFTWARE

In the US, one million units of *Pokémon*



February saw *Dead Or Alive 2* controversially debut on Sony-branded hardware in Japan

2000 words
Peter Molyneux, Lionhead

"Three good points:
1. Everybody is making amazing pieces of hardware. Everybody's leapfrogging everybody else, so eventually we'll end up with games that will totally blow people away.
2. This one impressed and slightly depressed me: the quality of the sequels that are coming out.
3. Getting the Lionhead Satellites structure up and running – it wasn't as easy as some might think.

Three bad points:
1. That the PS2 didn't launch with the range of quality software that, as a gameplayer, I would have liked. What we don't have are all those demos that they had in the early days turning into fantastic games. I'm sure it'll pan out, and there'll be great software out there. It's relatively easy to build expectations, but it's far harder to fulfil them. I'm sure other hardware manufacturers will make the same mistake, though.
2. That *Black & White* has taken longer than I'd originally hoped. It's terrible: everybody's so tired, but you have to get them to carry on. Of course, it's also bad for people who are looking forward to the game.
3. That the industry is distilling itself down to so few publishers – and, to a certain extent, so few developers. It just seems to be a smaller community all the time. It's the way things have to be, I suppose.

Game of the year? It would have to be *Deus Ex*."

2000

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In March, *Tekken Tag Tournament* shifted more than 400,000 copies in its first week on sale in Japan

2000 words
David Doak, Free Radical Design

'Best thing about 2000? Getting *TimeSplitters* done for console launch. Worst? Getting *TimeSplitters* done for console launch. Of course, if I came clean on the 'worst' I'd probably be in the Land of Libel so I'll just stay schtum. Most impressive parlour game? The ever-popular 'PS2 Hunt'.

Stadium go into retail, with N64 sales up approximately 40 per cent. Meanwhile, *Tekken Tag Tournament* sells more than 400,000 copies in its first four days on shelves, claims Namco. In the UK, it's pretty much as you were, as *Resident Evil: Nemesis*, *GT2*, *Toy Story* and *Pokémon* continue to occupy the top of the pile. A Dreamcast game finally charts with a degree of conviction in Y2K – *Crazy Taxi* (7/10) enters at number four in the ChartTrack All Formats, while *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* is also a minor hit on its DC release. Mucky Foot's enjoyable *Urban Chaos* (8/10) is released on PlayStation, and only briefly troubles the fairly still waters of the Top 20; *Die Hard Trilogy 2* barely limps into the Top 40. *Ultima Ascension* arrives – and proves one of the most problematic launches for a number of years. Virtually unplayable without a Voodoo-based 3D card, it's an absolute mess. There's a game in there, somewhere, but it's marred by crash bugs and flaws too numerous to count. It suffers miserable sales, confined with alacrity to the mausoleum that is the discount bin. Speaking of disasters, Eidos announces that *Daikatana* is all but finished, and denies claims that they are to withdraw support from subsequent Ion Storm releases *Deus Ex* and *Anachronox*.

HARDWARE

The PS2 finally reaches the Japanese public and 600,000 are sold at retail, with a further 120,000 bought online. Software sales hit 1.3 million units, with *Tekken Tag Tournament* the top title. There are complaints that a number of preorders are not fulfilled, but Sony has reason to be pleased: it's the most successful console launch ever in Japan. Intolerant of the international grey market as ever, Sony fires off warnings to indies and firms importing PS2 into Europe that they are breaking the law. PS2 does not yet have the CE marking, indicating that it has been approved and conforms with Euro safety standards – sales could lead to civil liability, they warn, weakly. However, many indies choose not to stock Jap machines for other reasons – partly because shortages in Japan make purchases difficult, but also because gossip circulates that doing so might affect allocations of official units come September. It's also announced that PlayStation1 is to be cosmetically redesigned and relaunched before the end of the year.

At the Game Developers Conference in San Jose, Bill Gates uses his allocated time on the podium to talk of XBox – and, of course, it's perfectly timed to steal a little of Sony's thunder. The tech specs suggested in February prove to be fairly accurate, with the CPU at 600MHz and the hard disk weighing in at 8Gb. No date is set for its appearance but, uniquely, a simultaneous global launch is mentioned. US company Indrema, in turn, unveils its plans for a Linux-based console, the L600 Entertainment System. Plugging in to a TV, it will have an infrared keyboard, Internet access, a 600Mhz processor, 64Mb RAM, and a large hard drive. It's a bad month for the N64 in the UK, though, as Argos announces that it is to drop the console. To clear stocks in an incredible limited deal, it sells the hardware and *GoldenEye* for £50, all in. This is indicative of a wider malaise – many shops are reducing the shelf space allocated to the machine, while discounting old stock heavily in an attempt to reduce inventories. Only *Pokémon* can save it now.

APRIL

INDUSTRY

With PlayStation2 smashing console sales records in Japan and the PlayStation alive and kicking, the autumn Tokyo Game Show is understandably dominated by titles for Sony formats. Sega's lineup bodes well, with a number of distinctive titles on show, while Microsoft opts for a low-key approach, with its execs out spreading the good word. As the industry poised to tighten its belt for the traditional summer slump, it's fast becoming apparent that the little piggies of the dotcom community have built their houses with straw. A report by Forrester Research suggests that many online retailers will be out of business by this time next year; pundits are concerned that listed game publishers may suffer when the bubble bursts, due to the nature of their trade. It's a worrying development when those in the financial trade add a sharp intake of breath as a prefix to the phrase 'tech stocks'. Still, at least gamers stand to profit in the short term – online game retailers are desperate for hits, and are discounting aggressively. URWired, for example, runs a promotion in which it sells 1,000 copies of *FIFA 2000* at 50p per copy, during an advertised hour.

In the US, 20 jobs are lost at Texas-based Origin – but, with the concentration of codeshops per square inch almost approaching that of the Guildford area, former staff don't have to look too far afield for further employment. *Wing Commander Online* is canned, while Richard Garriot – alter ego of *Ultima* character Lord British – leaves under a cloud. The general consensus is that *Ultima Ascension* was the catalyst. **Edge** receives the news that Richard Katz, creator of the .zip file, has died, and *Amiga Format* finally closes. In a trade paper interview, SOE chief **JF Cecillon** confides that: "Every day I say to myself: why don't we have EA?"

SOFTWARE

While the PlayStation is far and away the dominant format in the UK, the N64 enjoys an upturn in fortunes with the arrival of *Pokémon Stadium* – software sales are double those of March. Dreamcast owners finally get to enjoy the leftfield *Sega Bass Fishing*, but it's an otherwise moribund month for the format's aficionados. Codemasters briefly loses its Midas touch with *Micro Maniacs* (7/10) – the game charts half-heartedly, before disappearing – and, in a similar vein, *Thief 2* (8/10) fails to relish the success its ample qualities should, in an ideal world, guarantee. Titles with numerical suffixes ride high in the charts, with Will Wright's *The Sims* almost seeming out of place at the top of the PC pile. *Resident Evil: Gun Survivor* (4/10), *Star Wars: Force Commander*, *Toy Story 2* and *WWF Smackdown* all fly the franchise flag, while aspirant brands *Syphon Filter 2* (7/10) and *Medievil 2* also perform well.

HARDWARE

Sony announces its intentions to sell ten million PlayStation2 units worldwide during its first year on sale – and the industry has little reason to doubt the corporation's ability to do so. The Japanese giant's plan to release a separate hard drive for the console, however, meets with rather more

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May

WEEK 18 2000

cynicism. It's no surprise that Sony is keen on the 'Trojan horse' principle, but when has an expensive console peripheral ever achieved any real success? Moreover, American critics suggest that the decision to ship in the US without a built-in modem is also a potential error. Sega of America, meanwhile, announces plans to 'give away' the Dreamcast to any user that signs up for its new SegaNet ISP – the proviso being that customers pay for a minimum two-year contract, with subs priced at $21 (£14) per month. With the Pokémon-propelled N64 boasting 46 per cent of all console hardware sales during March, PlayStation 43 per cent, and Dreamcast a mere 11 per cent, SOA certainly needs to do something. Sega apologists in Europe hold their breath for an equivalent SOE promulgation, and remain blue in the face until...

MAY

INDUSTRY

In the worst month of 2000 in terms of UK software sales, one topic of conversation dominates: the unveiling of *Metal Gear Solid: Sons Of Liberty* at E3. Played at regular intervals on a large video wall, Hideo Kojima's PS2 update of his PlayStation adventure is met with a rapturous reception. It's hard to convey the excitement the ten-minute video enkindles without appearing slavish – for arguably the first time since 1999, a PS2 game appears to be capable of living up to the (perhaps unreasonable) expectations sired by early technology demos and fabricated in-game screenshots. Again, Nintendo leaves Dolphin at home, while XBox also fails to make an official debut. For game connoisseurs, however, this is undoubtedly Sega's E3. Its demo units feature the likes of *Jet Grind Radio*, a translated *Shenmue*, and *Quake III Arena*, among many other promising titles. Even blinkered Sony groupies speculate that, but for Kojima-san's prospective opus, Sega might have completely stolen the show. Rumours of the DC's demise, it seems, are greatly exaggerated – if cash exists to actually promote the fine autumn/winter catalogue, that is. There is positive news in the UK for Dreamcast owners, too, as Sega announces it will give away Sonic Team's *ChuChu Rocket!* free to all registered Dreamarena users from June 9. There's also talk of a price cut in autumn and an official budget range. But, as **Edge** wonders, is it all too little, too late? Finally, in terms of E3 occurrences, Peter Molyneux announces that *Black & White* will be his last game to lead on PC.

The news that US store Montomery Wards is to clear its stores of games marked with the 'mature' ERSB rating in its 251 stores causes concern. Other large retail chains may also follow suit – and the repercussions for UK gamers are obvious. The moral climate in America is such that certain forms of censorship are regarded as virtuous. With many leading softcos geared towards its lucrative market, and as much localisation work takes place at or is dictated by US offices of Japanese publishers, this is a worrying development. Still, at least the industry can boast a degree of stability and profitability: while the likes of EA, 3DO, and Konami announce profits, the dotcom bubble has well and truly burst.

SOFTWARE

It's perhaps fortunate that the industry and punters alike are distracted by future software hits at E3, as May proves to be an awful month. Jez San is reputedly livid as Argonaut's *Red Dog* on Dreamcast hits stores with little or no promotional support from publisher Sega – and it barely manages to figure in even the DC top five, adding insult to injury. A firm candidate for a 'worst packaging of the year' award appears in the form of Microsoft's *Starlancer*, while Ubi Soft's *Dukes of Hazzard* is a PlayStation title to forget. That it charts at all – it hovers at the lower end of the All Formats Top 10 – is something of a travesty. *WWF Smackdown*, *The Sims*, and all hues and forms of *Pokémon* remain popular throughout the month, while LucasArts' *Jedi Power Battles* and EA's *Euro 2000* tie-in also figure. Christmas will always be the games industry's most lucrative season, but surely May needn't be this sterile?

HARDWARE

Europe is declared as the biggest PlayStation market, with more than 28 million hardware sales, compared to 27m in the US and 17m in Japan. PS2, it transpires, is firmly poised to enjoy a similar level of success – in Japan, at least. Three months after its March release, the machine is – on paper – the most lucrative hardware launch in history. It has an installed user base of approximately 2.15m, with 26 individual titles on sale. Compare and contrast this with the Japanese launch performances of other consoles during the same timespan: the N64 (950,000 consoles, three games), Dreamcast (525,000 units, 13 games) and the original PlayStation (508,732 units; roughly on a par with the Saturn).

JUNE

INDUSTRY

After a dismal May, June is undoubtedly a better month for gamers hungry for quality software – but it's not so hot for the industry as a whole. Hasbro is struggling, with restructuring on the cards. Things also look grim at the ailing Mattel, while Eidos is cited as a takeover target – Infogrames and Microsoft are mooted as likely predators. The latter are certainly keen to make acquisitions prior to the appearance of XBox, as the company's purchase of Bungie and FASA demonstrates this month. Sadly, there's also bad news for Lionhead's novel Satellites system, as its deal with Activision falls through, while revered US codeshop Looking Glass suffers as EA cans *Jane's Attack Squadron*.

In the US, major retail outlets continue, perversely, to preach their newly acquired 'morality' to customers, with Sears the latest chain to announce its decision to drop 'mature'-rated games, and K-Mart, it is said, is considering a similar move. A legal row kicks off between publishers of football games and individuals and entities from the sport itself. As is so often the case with brand-oriented bickering, the message from the soccer moguls is, ostensibly, 'show us

Europe is declared as the biggest PlayStation market, with more than 28 million hardware sales, compared to 27m in the US and 17m in Japan

2000 words
Dave Perry, Shiny Entertainment

"For me, the three 'best' moments of the year were:
1. The *Metal Gear Solid 2* video at E3.
2. PS2 finally hitting the store shelves and my gaming shelf at home.
3. *Sacrifice* shipping in time for Christmas. Oh, and the Olympus Eye-Trek – now I can play games in bed.
The three 'worst' moments of the year:
1. Sony's controversial launch of the PS2 (the ultimate tease).
2. *Midtown Madness 2* arriving in the mail after paying for it (it's just so crap).
3. Still waiting for Game Boy Advance.
My personal favourite game of the year was *Soldat 3 Elite Edition*. However, and I'm not bullshitting you, I play our new game *Sacrifice* more than any game I have ever played. (I was online yet again until midnight last night. The multiplayer against the fresh blood out there has me hooked.)".



Black & White drew PC fans at E3. It will be the last Peter Molyneux-designed title to lead on PC

2000

JAN

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Resident Evil – Code: Veronica was Eidos' DC hit during June. It reached the number two spot

the money'. This could lead to sports games – with the actual player names and teams that fans crave – becoming the sole preserve of publishing supergiants.

It's a strange month for Sega, which launches a £5m pan-European ad campaign to coincide with Euro 2000 – which, frankly, stinks. While obviously intended to promote the belated arrival of networked gaming on the Dreamcast, its 'Take On Johnny Foreigner Online' ads are described by many as embarrassing. One particular commercial – featuring a stereotyped German, no less – is actually suspended after the ITC expresses concerns. When Sega projects an ad on to the Houses of Parliament as part of the campaign, you can almost smell the desperation.



SOFTWARE

Gran Turismo 2 and both hues of *Pokémon* on Game Boy are announced as the most successful games of 2000's first quarter; *Resident Evil: Nemesis*, *FIFA 2000*, and *The Sims* were also popular at retail. *Crazy Taxi* is apparently Sega's biggest game of the year thus far, albeit with far fewer sales than even middleweight titles on more established formats. Still, at least Sega can derive a little cheer from the news that Japanese PS2 owners are turned off by the machine's software library. After accounting for almost 50 per cent of software sales in Japan around the time of its launch, PS2 game sales now represent a comparitively modest eight per cent of the total market. Many point fingers at the DVD functionality of the hardware, and suggest that money is moving in that direction as it's clearly evident that DVD movie sales have skyrocketed since the PS2's arrival. Other, more savvy observers, however, mutter that the lack of quality games is a far bigger factor – and that the discerning Japanese gamer is sticking with PSone titles.

Eidos is pleased as it scores the biggest Dreamcast success of the year with *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* – it enters ChartTrack's All Formats listing at a highly creditable number two. *Ecco The Dolphin* also reaches shelves but, inevitably, is overshadowed by its aforementioned peer. All in all, June is a good month for gamers. *Shogun: Total War* finally hits retail, and is an instant (and well-deserved) hit; the enjoyable RTS *Dark Reign 2* also ships but, like its forebear, is eclipsed by a sexier rival release. *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* marks a return to form for Codemasters – it's a critical and commercial monster that dispels the gloom that followed *Micro Maniacs*' disappointing performance. Of course, *Pokémon Yellow* also deserves a mention: with THE claiming there are two million units shipping across Europe, 500,000 of which are heading for the UK, it's a launch of some significance. Unsurprisingly, it immediately hits the top of sales charts. Square's *Vagrant Story* does well on PlayStation, but *Alundra 2* – now published by Activision – barely registers. There's also the not inconsiderable matter of *Perfect Dark*'s arrival on the last weekend of the month. Naturally, last month's top performers also figure – in particular, *WWF Smackdown*, *Pokémon Stadium*, *The Sims*, and *Euro 2000*.

Heeding the prayers of many hardcore gamers, David Braben announces his intention to develop a fourth *Elite*, for next-gen platforms. It will have both online and oneplayer portions, but broadband is Braben's focus. Typically, BT announces yet another delay to the rollout of ADSL.

{ David Braben announces a fourth *Elite* title, for next-gen platforms, with both online and oneplayer portions, but broadband is his focus }

HARDWARE

Sony announces that there will be no PS2 stock on shelves in the UK before the end of the year. Instead, it plans to use a controversial preorder system, whereby each individual machine is allocated to an end user. There will be checks to prevent stores from creating phantom customers, while trade margins on hardware sales – both in Europe and the US – will be tiny. Retailers are distraught, but Sony mollifies its critics somewhat by unveiling the attractively redesigned PlayStation – now bearing the monicker PSone. It will be launched during July in Japan, Autumn in the UK, and will eventually boast mobile-phone connectivity and an LCD screen peripheral.

It's a month of contrasts for the Dreamcast. While *Code: Veronica* is undoubtedly the type of big-name game the format so desperately needs, retail finally tires of waiting for Sega to better promote the console and take matters into its own hands. Its RRP is slashed by £50 in many stores – and sales, reportedly, are up 250-400 per cent after the move. As the Virgin Megastores chain publicly reveals that it is considering moving shelf space away from the underperforming DC, there are calls for Sega to make an 'official' price cut. And what is SOE doing? Securing another sponsorship deal with its reputedly limited cash resources, this time with Deportivo La Coruna. The phrase 'own worst enemy' leaps to mind.

It's a mixed month for handheld machines, too. While the Game Boy – in its common-or-garden and Color varieties – momentously passes the 100m worldwide sales mark, SNK withdraws from the international market. Its Neo-Geo Pocket Color device is, to all intents and purposes, dead in the west. Perhaps mindful of the GB's continued popularity, the Game Boy Advance launch is put back from August to November in Japan – a 'shortage of vital components' being the given reason. **Edge** assumes Nintendo means games.

Finally, alpha XBox dev kits are reportedly shipped to codeshops. Microsoft is only doing so, however, when a game's concept has been approved. It's reckoned that the port to original game ratio will be indicative of the machine's future success when MS announces its thirdparty partners. But will a currently cash-conscious industry be willing to invest millions to create 'new' titles?

JULY

INDUSTRY

Belying statements from publishers that feature the word 'transitional', Electronics Boutique announces a 13 per cent increase in year-on-year sales. However, with the price of PlayStation games being lower, actual revenues are not significantly higher. A number of July's events paint a bleak

2000

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picture, though. While talk of Infogrames buying Eidos continues, EA announces losses during Q1 2000, while blaming a lack of big releases. Sound card manufacturer Aureal is reportedly in big trouble, and Infogrames reveals that GT Interactive made losses of some $320m (£217m) during the financial year ending March 31. In the States, Midway lays off 75 staff, and Looking Glass closes its doors. Fans of the PC developer can take solace from the news that Ion Storm will now produce *Thief 3*, with Warren Spector in charge; several Looking Glass staff will follow the project to its new home. In the UK, Acclaim's Croydon development studio – formerly known as Probe, the veteran 'hit' factory – is to close.

On a less gloomy note, Oxford-based devco Rebellion acquires the comic *2000AD* and the IP that entails, while aspirant French publisher Ubi Soft announces that it is in rude financial health. Sony and Nintendo are to star at ECTS, and Konami declares that it is to open a European development studio – with the UK as the likely site.

SOFTWARE

In the week ending July 15, the N64 format – buoyed by *Pokémon Stadium* and *Perfect Dark* – boasts 10.9 per cent of console software sales in the UK, while DC languishes in last place, with 7.8 per cent. The PlayStation is far ahead with 47 per cent. The fine *Fur Fighters* (8/10) flops, while Revolution's *In Cold Blood* (4/10) fares well at retail. The top sellers of July are largely titles released in previous months: *Perfect Dark*, *Colin McRae 2.0*, *WWF Smackdown*, and *The Sims* are all favourites in stores nationwide. It goes without saying that the *Pokémon* franchise continues to thrive, but perhaps the two most notable titles of the month are based on the PC. *Diablo 2*, to all intents and purposes an update of *Gauntlet* with a focus on online functionality, achieves the remarkable feat of arriving in more than one million homes worldwide within the space of a fortnight. For a PC title, that's a stellar performance. And, after the dismal mess of *Daikatana*, Ion Storm – amazingly – stuns its critics with the release of *Deus Ex*. Warren Spector's intelligent, considered FPS/adventure hybrid shoots straight to the top of the US games charts.

HARDWARE

Nintendo's Dolphin – or is it Star Cube? – will feature a proprietary DVD-ROM system, according to anoymous sources. Intriguingly, each game DVD is expected to be approximately the size of a MiniDisc, with the storage capacity being somewhere between one and two gigabytes. There's still no clarification on the subject of DVD movie playback, however. It's looking unlikely that the machine will be released in Japan before early 2001. With Pokémon filling the Nintendo coffers, and Game Boy Advance apparently ready to roll when the Japanese giant sees fit, this is hardly surprising. Best not be too tardy, though – apparently, a handheld Amiga is currently in R&D somewhere in the world, with a desktop machine also on the cards.

Sony is the Grinch, and it has stolen Christmas, cry retailers. After delaying the opening of its preorder scheme until September 7 – it wants to be sure of the actual allocation of units – educated conjecture abounds that the machine won't actually arrive until November. Its RRP will almost certainly be £300, while the initial suggestion of a 200,000 machine rollout in the UK is looking doubtful – 150,000 is probably nearer the mark. Still, this presents a real window of opportunity for Sega, as the US is also likely to suffer PS2 stock shortages. Dreamcast's performance in the States – its strongest market – dipped throughout the four months from February (80,000 units) to May (34,000 units), according to news service Bloomberg. This winter, however, it will have the strongest software line-up of any format, and plenty of machines at retail. Sony may be providing Sega with a possible lifeline.

Meanwhile, Intel announces its new Pentium 4 range – with speeds of 1.4GHz on the cards – and, in a perhaps related development, Microsoft up XBox's processor speed to 733MHz. "Why are we putting a 733MHz chip in the box? Not to watch a movie, but to play a movie," raves **J Allard**.

AUGUST

INDUSTRY

Losing its golden touch for a fleeting instant, Sony is lambasted by the UK media for its planned £300 pricepoint for PS2. In a brief resurrection of the 'rip-off Britain' theme, *The Sun* (among others) calculates that British users are paying up to £100 more for the hardware than is actually 'necessary', having perused details of the US and UK launches. However, the really fruity story concerns how the adverse publicity began: rumours circulate that the entire story was instigated by an individual connected to a rival console company.

While Infogrames, Take 2, and Interplay make positive financial announcements – the latter, despite making a loss, posts its best operating results for two years – the future looks problematic for Hasbro. A management buyout, or, more likely, a takeover by a rival publisher looks inevitable. Etailer URWired closes its virtual doors after running out of funds, while videogame magazine sales are down in the latest round of ABC figures – Dreamcast, PlayStation and N64-specific titles, in particular, suffer. A study by John Colwell of Middlesex university meets with widespread media coverage – he's claiming that it proves 'a strong casual link' between playing videogames and antisocial behavior. It's met with widespread derision from the games industry, and his methodology is questioned – the report consisted of studying 200 pupils at a North London school. Meanwhile, a poll by Amazon's UK site reveals that Mario is recognised by four times the number of children that know who Chancellor Gordon Brown is, while 93 per cent of kids can put a name to Pikachu's face – two per cent more than with Tony Blair.

SOFTWARE

With Geoff Crammond's *GP3* (8/10) and Ion Storm's *Deus Ex* (9/10) arriving in stores, it's a good month for PC owners. Both titles battle for sales supremacy throughout the month. *Dead Or Alive 2* (8/10) finally wobbles its way to retail, and mesmerises sufficient Dreamcast owners to trouble the top ten of the All Formats chart, while *TOCA: World Touring Cars* (8/10) marks another critical and commercial success for Codemasters. PlayStation owners also get to enjoy the unique charms of *Vib Ribbon* (6/10), and THQ's *WWF Smackdown* is still there or thereabouts, while *Tomb Raider*

2000 words

Demis Hassabis, Elixir Studios

"Three 'best' moments of 2000:
1: *Republic* winning the game of the show award at E3 from *PC Format*.
2: Realising a childhood fantasy by walking into a games shop and spending £1,500 on games for the office games room.
3: Checking out the new games at E3.
Three 'worst' moments of 2000:
1: Sprinting towards a Heathrow departure gate, cradling a server-sized demo PC in my arms, with the words 'GATE CLOSING' next to our scheduled flight to E3.
2: *Shenmue* turning out not to be the revolution I hoped it would be.
3: Checking out the new games at E3.
Most impressive game of 2000? For originality alone I think it would have to be *The Sims*."



Following a lean mid-year period, August saw quality such as *Deus Ex* reaching shop shelves



A glimpse of Samus Aran was enough to convince most Spaceworld attendees of Nintendo's future

finally arrives on Game Boy. It's a great little game, but even Ms Croft can't begin to challenge the supremacy of Pokémon.

Reports relate that PS2 games are still deflated in Japan – despite the machine passing the three million units mark. The sterility of the market is perhaps best explained by the unspectacular nature of the games on offer. Still, there's hope for the industry yet: popular Amiga programming language *Blitz Basic* is to be ressurected and published for the PC. In a bedroom near you, the new *Tetris* could be born... No, hold on, it's a *Space Invaders* clone.

HARDWARE

Dolphin is dead: long live GameCube. At its Spaceworld event in Japan, Nintendo finally ends months of growing speculation by unveiling its next-gen console. Nintendo's attitude almost seems to be a composite of that of its console manufacturing peers. If GameCube will support online gaming, it's certainly not an integral aspect of the company's launch plan. Similarly, it will not offer DVD playback. Unusually, the Japanese giant is remarkably reticent on the subject of technical specifications. While its immediate peers in the hardware business are keen to spout tales of polygons per second and other such (often, in practical terms, exaggerated) trivia, Nintendo's attitude seems to be: 'It's good enough for the games we intend to create'. The demonstrations of its potential power, however, are stunning. Miyamoto-san's Mario demo elicits chuckles and approval from onlookers, while a short sequence of footage featuring Samus, of *Metroid* fame, is greeted by a roof-raising cheer. The general consensus on the appearance of GameCube is that there is no general consensus – no two people appear to agree on whether the design is appealing, although everyone seems excited by the Miyamoto-designed joypad. As Nintendo espouses the merits of GameCube's developer-friendly architecture, it's unquestionable that the embryonic format has huge potential – but Yamauchi-san will have to dig deep into pockets filled by Pokémon to compete against Microsoft and Sony. The console will most likely launch in Japan early in 2001, with an autumn release in the US. There is, disturbingly, no mention of a possible European date.

Game Boy Advance also makes an appearance at Spaceworld, with the most interesting game being a rewrite of *Mario Kart* that stays true to the original SNES classic. The handheld won't hit stores until 2001, however – but with the Game Boy continuing to thrive, this is hardly startling news. In the UK, PlayStation2's launch date is officially delayed until November 24 when – as is widely reported in the media – it will retail at £300. In anticipation of its arrival, SOE and SOA are preparing for an 'official' price cut for Dreamcast. Given that stores have been selling the machine at $150 and £150 for the past few months, this move is unlikely to make a real impact on sales – unless, that is, retailers are prepared to once more cut their own margins by discounting or offering generous bundle deals. Many industry figures predict that this Christmas will be Dreamcast's last gasp. "Sega seems to have lost its way. They had a great head start, but they've blown their lead. They don't return phone calls or emails, and they don't market their games properly. It's sad... that they almost had a chance, but now their chance has gone," says **Jez San** in **Edge**.

SEPTEMBER

INDUSTRY

On approaching the huge XBox logo outside the Makuhari Messe, some may have expected the autumn Tokyo Game Show to boast revelations to match those of last month's SpaceWorld event. But no: while attendance figures are far from disappointing, there are many notable absentees. After impressing at the event earlier in the year, and enjoying an excellent E3, Sega opts to stay at home – as do SquareSoft and SNK, among others. **Edge** counts some 16 Dreamcast games on show, compared to 160 for both generations of PlayStation. There's very little to get genuinely excited about – and, worse still, Microsoft's presence transpires to be a big tease. With iMode big in Japan, those interested in mobile-phone games have plenty to see and do, but many find themselves wandering home with a lovely new XBox bag and a more than vague sense of dissatisfaction. Conversely, Game Boy Advance is undoubtedly the highlight of 2000's ECTS event, and the first 'official' UK showing of the *Metal Gear Solid: Sons Of Liberty* demo meets with a predictably rapturous reception. It's not a bad year for the show, although Sega's absence is saddening (it holds its own minor event at a Leicester Square cinema, where a Dreamcast *Daytona* is unveiled).

With an ostentatious live satellite link-up between San Francisco, London, and Tokyo, Microsoft holds a bash to announce the developers who have declared intent to create games for its prospective format. Although, as **Edge** later reports, the developer roster reads like a who's who of videogame creation, EA and SquareSoft are notable absentees. Of course, many of the games that appear during a rolling demo of future XBox titles are ports; the few glimpses of original titles are tantalisingly brief. There is, however, a gratifying moment of comic relief from the serious business of hyping a new machine when Microsoft takes the time to explain the message inherent in its official XBox logo. It is, apparently: "Designed to exude three key messages: powerful technology, an exhilarating experience and fresh, inventive gameplay."

There are more ups and downs for developers and publishers, with Mattel's games division in further trouble and Acclaim forced to can its Ferrari game. On a more positive note, Capcom is set to publish its own games in Europe after years of going through thirdparty agreements – it is also looking to source games at a local level. The videogame industry may be significantly more professional these days than it ever was in its 8bit era, but it's pleasant to note that there's still room for a little eccentricity. In one of the most surreal licencing deals in years, publishing minnow Microids is to create a game called *The Mission*, based on the Nike commercial where soccer stars retrieve a football from a building guarded by robots.

Overshadowing such events, of course, is the redesign of a certain multiformat videogames magazine.

SOFTWARE

Sony finally releases details of the PS2's likely pre-Christmas software catalogue –

2000 words
Roger Bennett, ELSPA

"Three 'high' points of the year:
1. First ever ELSPA AGM to be addressed by a minister (Janet Anderson MP – DCMS), followed by a personal meeting to promote specific proposals on behalf of the industry as a whole and the subsequent invitation from the DfEE to discuss bridge building between the games industry and the education sector.
2. Successful formation and registration of the industry's own charity – The Entertainment Software Charity.
3. The consolidation of the most enthusiastic, hard working, and committed team ever within ELSPA.
Three 'low' points of the year:
1. The continued lack of investment in the UK leisure software industry.
2. I am never pessimistic.
3. Talk of doom and gloom in the industry.
Most impressive game of the year?
Who am I to judge?"

2000

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(272–94) THURSDAY 28

but there are few surprises. The only title that seems capable of challenging the mediocre *Ridge Racer V* and competent *Tekken Tag Tournament* is Free Radical Design's *TimeSplitters*. Disappointingly, far too many correspondents – in both specialist and mainstream media – are disturbingly overenthusiastic about the PS2's debut titles. "Shoot 'em up *Gradius*, meanwhile, looks like one long action sequence from something like 'Star Wars', although nobody knows what it is like to play," enthuses *The Telegraph*. The journo has mistaken the prerendered intro for the actual game – providing a moment of mirth that actually, for a brief moment, distracts chuckling **Edge** staffers from playing Dreamcast games.

One DC game, in particular, demands a huge slice of everyone's time: the wonderful *Virtua Tennis*. On release, it charts at the top of ChartTrack's All Formats – Sega's first of the year – supplanting *Pokémon Yellow* and Codemasters' *World Touring Cars* in the process. Dreamcast owners also get to enjoy the considerable charms of *Hidden & Dangerous* and *Power Stone 2* – although, frustratingly, the latter barely sells. Even *WWF Royal Rumble* on DC charts at 15. There is, truly, no accounting for taste – but at least the banal *Chase The Express* (PS, 3/10) and the execrable *Big Brother: The Game* on PC flounder, too. On PlayStation, it's a glorious month for Neversoft and Activision, with *Spider-Man* (7/10) and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* (8/10) hitting stores; *Star Trek: Elite Force* (7/10) and the enormous *Baldur's Gate II* (8/10) are the notable PC performers. Oh, and *Daikatana* – you remember? – gets its first patch: a modest 44Mb download.

HARDWARE

PlayStation2 preordering begins, with Sony sticking to its original line that 200,000 units will reach the UK by Christmas. It will compete against the newly relaunched PlayStation – the PSone rolls into retail on September 29, exactly five years after the original UK launch. With its pricepoint at £80, it's not unreasonable to expect it might overshadow its big brother in terms of sales during the coming winter – especially if Sony's European allocation of the PS2 should be reduced.

At long last, Sega finally drops the Dreamcast's RRP to an 'official' £150. Dreamcast sales are up, but so too are those of the PlayStation. According to figures released by PC Data, Sony sold 13,405 PlayStation units in August, up to 21,863 this month. There were 5,070 DC sales in August, rising to 7,971 throughout September. The Game Boy, however, eclipsed both: although its sales drop from 35,953 during August to 30,675 this month, it's still enjoying an outstanding year.

> Anyone with a degree of intelligence usually regards awards ceremonies as meaningless fluff… but surely the industry can afford an event of its own

OCTOBER

INDUSTRY

Mattel's acquisition of The Learning Company – having paid $3.5bn for the publishing group in March 1999 – looks to have been more than a little optimistic. Ending months of speculation its Interactive division finally acquires a new owner, an affiliate of the Gores Technology Group. The deal has no cash value, which is indicative of just how bad things have become for Mattel. Hasbro Interactive, similarly, is in dire straits. The division has lost $170m in two years of trading. A definite buyer has yet to be found. While EA is reputed to be interested in individual properties, no one comes forward to buy the company outright. Meanwhile, Infogrames gives up its chase to buy Eidos.

The BAFTA Interactive awards… ah, what to say of the BAFTA awards. It's difficult to be objective while respecting the feelings of those who win gongs, but really: the event is rather shambolic. Professional in terms of execution, the entire ceremony (and the bizarre nomination procedure) is blighted by the fact that it has no genuine focus: the 'interactive' remit is way too broad. Amid various multimedia applications and Web sites, a few games garner accolades. That *Deus Ex* wins the Best PC Game award is right – it's a deserved winner. But *Medievil 2* scooping Best Console Game? *Perfect Dark* having to settle for the vague Moving Images award? Anyone with a degree of intelligence usually regards award ceremonies as meaningless fluff; they present an opportunity for leading lights within a trade to engage in a spot of harmless back slapping. But surely the games industry can afford a glittery event of its own, without having to slum it with dotcom types.

There are a few murmurs of surprise as Oddworld Inhabitants is signed by Microsoft as a firstparty developer. *Munch's Oddysee*, previously PS2-bound, will be an XBox exclusive, along with a further four instalments – testament, perhaps, to the abiding appeal of flatulence gags. On an entirely unrelated note, Codemasters' David Darling wins the UK Entrepreneur of the Year award – the European finals, into which he is automatically entered, will take place in early 2001.

(273–93) FRIDAY 29

SOFTWARE

The fortnight ending October 14 is typified by the absolute dominance of two brands. On the two Nintendo formats, Pokémon reigns supreme. The PC, Dreamcast and PlayStation markets, however, are ruled by *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* from Eidos. Only the arrival of the enjoyable *Ferrari F355 Challenge* (7/10) on Dreamcast prevents the rather weak TV tie-in from claiming the number one spot on the trio of formats for a third week. In the States, NOE claims that *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* sell 1.4 million copies between them during their first week on sale. Neversoft's infant reputation as a hit factory to be reckoned with is strengthened by the excellent performance of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* and *Spider-Man*; *Baldur's Gate II* continues to top the PC charts. *Midtown Madness 2* (6/10), much like its forebear, appears to be largely ignored by the PC market despite – once again – an invariably favourable critical reception.

HARDWARE

Amid accusations that shortages are little more than marketing spin – although there are reliable reports that Sony has had genuine problems with manufacturing



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 cemented Neversoft's reputation as a codeshop worth depending on

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30 MONDAY

chips in Japan – PlayStation2 arrives in the US. Having cut its initial allocation of one million machines by half, Sony comfortably shifts the remaining 500,000 once the consumer frenzy begins on October 26. While prelaunch coverage in the UK has focused upon the £300 pricepoint, most American reports discuss the shortages – and it's the kind of prelaunch hype that money can't buy. Sony is intending to sell 1.3m PS2s in the US before the end of the year. Few doubt its ability to do so.

> { From its glass abode, Sega opts to lob a few rocks. In a cheeky gesture, SOA offers 'deepest condolences to Sony on their PS2 shipping difficulties' }

31 TUESDAY

From its glass abode, Sega opts to lob a few rocks. In a cheeky gesture, SOA runs advertisements that feature a red-headed youngster sticking his tongue out. 'Our deepest condolences to Sony on their PS2 shipping difficulties', is the accompanying message. In a further moment of impudence, Sega also claims that it has been stockpiling Dreamcast units since June, in anticipation of Sony encountering shortages at launch. Sales of the console are rising – and Sega has now surpassed the five million unit mark worldwide. There are 1.78m DCs in Japan, 2.5m in the US, 1.04m in Europe and 230,000 in Asia. And yet, mere days after its US debut, PS2 can boast 3.5m installed units worldwide – with a much-awaited European launch yet to arrive. Sega needs a truly magnificent Christmas, or the DC's future could be exceedingly bleak.

The dark horse in the console race, the Linux-based Indrema L600, will launch in the US during Spring 2001, with an initial software catalogue of some 30 titles and a rollout RRP of $300 (£202). CEO **John Gildred** tells **Edge** that he has a clear target demographic in mind: "We're targeting the hardcore gamer and Linux devotee – that 24 per cent segment of the market that is very influential and buys a disproportionate number of games and products. We're not targeting the Pokémon market, so we're not running a high-profile campaign because it would dilute the message that we're a high-end, special product."



TimeSplitters: Free Radical Design delivering the PlayStation2 goods on time. Unlike most others

NOVEMBER

INDUSTRY

Sega announces expected losses of $204m (£138m) in the year to March 31, 2001, having previously predicted a profit of $130m (£88m). Perhaps mindful of the phrase 'always next year', corporate vice president Shouichi Yamazaki claims that a profit will come in the year commencing April 1, 2001. Reports that the company's plans to become 'an online network and content company', and that a degree of semi-independence given to its software division as regards other platforms are misinterpreted by certain quarters of the industry. Sega insists it was referring to PCs, wireless phones, PDA devices, and set-top boxes, and that it will not, contrary to popular belief, be rushing to write or convert titles for PS2, GameCube, or XBox.

Sony also posts losses for Q2 of 2000, but no one bats an eyelid, while Microsoft looks set to gain that which eluded Sega, with an official announcement that EA will develop for XBox anticipated before the end of the year. While NVidia moves from strength to strength, pioneer and one-time market leader 3dfx announces its intention to pull out of 3D card manufacture to concentrate on selling its technology to thirdparties. It's a great month for Eidos, though: having battled against a takeover bid by Infogrames, the performance of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* looks to be filling the company coffers. It's not a great game, nor truly a deserved success – but Eidos, given its investment in small, promising development teams in recent years, should be cut a little slack.

The Emotion Engine's near-mystical powers do work, by proxy at least: reporting of the PS2 processor's inestimable powers in the mainstream media arouses tears of laughter throughout the industry. Oh, and a console is launched in Europe...

SOFTWARE

As per usual, November sees the industry at its most prolific. From the sublime *Majora's Mask* (9/10), to the workmanlike execution but enviable brand of *Red Alert 2* (5/10), the big names are out in force as the seasonal frenzy begins. *Driver 2* (5/10) is an inevitable success, while *Metropolis Street Racer* (9/10) is eagerly snapped up by Dreamcast owners – who, incidentally, receive the disheartening news that *Half-Life* will slip into 2001. In the charts, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*, *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, and *Championship Manager 00/01* are also favoured titles. The success of the latter – it keeps *Red Alert 2* off the top spot for two weeks, also foiling *FIFA*'s festive return on the second – is, no doubt, a private victory for developer Sports Interactive. After all, the original *Championship Manager* was rejected by EA over a decade ago.

PlayStation 2, of course, hits stores. Predictably, *Tekken Tag Tournament* (6/10) and *Ridge Racer V* (5/10) seem to top wish lists, but the popularity of Free Radical Design's *TimeSplitters* (8/10) is considerable, too. Possibly the most pleasing success story of the month is that EA's remarkably enjoyable *SSX* (8/10) – lauded, seemingly without exception, throughout the specialist media – is eagerly acquired by PS2 owners. The most shamefully overlooked title, however, must be *Jet Set Radio* (8/10). Competing against the biggest console launch in history with barely an apparent penny of marketing support – did it ever really stand a chance? Rumours abound that Sega Europe is flat broke – *MSR*'s ad campaign is a contractual obligation with developer Bizarre Creations – and no one steps forward to refute them with any real conviction.

HARDWARE

Just before its rollout, PlayStation2 allocation for European territories is cut by between 100,000 and 200,000. 165,000 will apparently reach UK retail in time for Christmas, although only 80,000 of these arrive in stores for its official launch date. Naturally, retailers are confronted with the unenviable task of pacifying gamers as they await for successive batches of prebooked stock to arrive. There are scuffles in stores in France between individuals desperate to get their hands on a machine; by contrast, Sony predicts 50,000 preorders in Germany, but

2000

JULY

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DEC

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S	2	9	16	23	30
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THURSDAY 30

the actual number made is nearer 30,000. In general, however, it's a resolutely successful debut. Sony reputedly seeks to make it more lucrative by engaging in a row with the European Commission over the 2.2 per cent customs duty levied on each console. The Japanese giant wants it to be classified as a computer (meaning less import duty) – it is, the company argues, more powerful than its predecessor and boasts online connectivity. Under EC classification, however, it is regarded as a console, as its forebear was. A legal catfight is predicted.

Sega's JF Cecillon believes that 500,000 Dreamcasts will be sold across Europe over Christmas. In the UK, retailers are doing their best to make his claim come true by offering hugely generous bundle offers. One store offers *ChuChu Rocket!*, *Aerowings*, *Bust A Move 4*, *Fur Fighters*, *RC Revolt*, and a DC for £170; an EB deal packages the console with *ChuChu Rocket!*, *Hidden & Dangerous*, and *Rayman 2* for the same price. A number of retailers are offering Dreamcasts with a multi-region DVD player, a game, and a film for £300 or less. One chain offers a DC, DVD player, *ChuChu Rocket!*, *Sonic Adventure*, *Lethal Weapon III*, and free Sky installation for £250.

DECEMBER

INDUSTRY

French behemoth Infogrames swells further as it purchases the rights to Hasbro's software business in a $100m (£68m) deal. The investment – only $5m of which, it is said, is hard cash – nets Bruno Bonnell's empire all of Hasbro Interactive's existing brands, including the Atari and Microprose portfolios. It also has a 15-year option to develop videogame iterations of Hasbro properties – which, given Infogrames' desire to offer family-friendly product, is a real cherry. It also sells the *Duke Nukem* franchise (*Forever* and all) to Take 2, publicly stating that the games are 'too violent'.

Nintendo is, at long last, to open a dedicated UK office – its distribution deal with THE Games is to officially end, with THE closing its doors as a result. Unfortunately, this will lead to delays for a handful of long-awaited N64 titles. Microsoft is to make another acquisition, this time Austin-based Digital Anvil – Chris *Wing Commander* Roberts and his brother Erin leave shortly afterwards, despite early rumours that the former would remain in his position until the *Freelancer* is complete. Sega's JF Cecillon also departs the firm in apparently amicable manner, and tells an industry trade paper: "I want to thank all the employees for their dedication which ensured that we, as a team, met the ambitious targets that we set for the company."

The most antic and unfortunate event of December, however, occurs when *The New York Times* publishes an article in which it alleges that Nintendo plans to buy Sega for $2bn. Sega shares plummet seven per cent with the news; its corporate stock is temporarily suspended. An obviously furious, yet endearingly polite Shanichi Nakamura (SOJ's corporate executive VP) immediately fires off a letter to the US paper. In it, he berates *The Times* for – with both Nintendo and Sega having flatly denied the rumour – printing a second article, repeating what he claims is baseless misinformation. You can read the letter in full at http://www.sega.co.jp/sega/corp/news/nr001229_1.html.

After a sufficiently pregnant pause – de rigueur for a publisher of any real stature – EA announces that it will develop for XBox. It plans to have up to ten titles available after the console's launch next year.

SOFTWARE

WWF Smackdown 2 becomes the fastest-selling PlayStation title of all time in the UK, accounting for 30 per cent of all sales on the console during its first week. But, just as TH*Q expects to grab the Christmas number one slot in the All Formats chart, a certain Eidos quiz game races past the finish line. In Japan, Sega's *Phantasy Star Online* receives critical acclaim, while SOE is heartened by a warm reception for *Shenmue* (8/10). It apparently outsells *MSR*'s total to date within its first week, although *Samba de Amigo*'s prospects aren't helped by shortages. *Quake III Arena* also enjoys strong sales.

On PlayStation, *Alien Resurrection*'s performance is curiously muted, and *The Last Revelation* (4/10) fails to match the achievements of past iterations of the series. *The World Is Not Enough* and *FIFA 2000* are big hits for EA. Much to the delight of hardcore gamers, *Majora's Mask* continues to awaken N64 owners from their post-*Pokémon Stadium* and *Perfect Dark* slumber – although heads are also turned by TH*Q's *WWF: No Mercy*. In Japan, Nintendo's machine is supported this Christmas with a pitiful handful of titles; this Yuletide period also looks to be its last of any significance in Europe.

HARDWARE

While PSone continues to positively leap from shelves, Tesco initiates a stampede with its announcement that it has 2,500 PS2s available for sale. Imported from a northern European country – Germany is a safe bet – they are snapped up before the day is out. Japanese PlayStation2 owners are briefly perturbed when a minor hardware revision causes incompatibility problems. The publishers of games that don't work will apparently replace them, free of charge – but Sony in the UK remains unrepentant as PS2 owners bemoan the fact that the machine will not play DVD movies via an RGB SCART cable.

WonderSwan Color is released in Japan, with a *Final Fantasy* game; Bandai expects to sell 600,000 units by the end of the month, although there's no talk yet of a western launch. Speaking of which, it seems that Microsoft's XBox will not reach Europe until 2002 – its Mexican manufacturing plant will produce units for the US and Japan, but the Hungarian plant designed to service the Euro market has yet to be built. So much for the ambitious global rollout, then. With no firm GameCube release date for the UK, 2001 will no doubt see import emporiums enjoy one of their most fruitful periods thus far.

Nintendo claims that it is to make shipments of some 24m Game Boy Advance handhelds during 2001. Although distinctly reticent on the subject of GameCube over Christmas, it also looks certain that EA will back the format. So what did Sega do wrong? Marking the end of an era in PC hardware, 3dfx's business is acquired by Nvidia for $70m (£47m) in cash and $1m (£676,000) in shares.

2000 words

Martyn Chudley, Bizarre Creations

"For me, three reasons to be cheerful from 2000:
1. Dreamcast started to be taken more seriously.
2. The success of *Virtua Tennis* shows that gameplay still rules.
3. Towards the end of 2000, things started to look up for the industry, as the next generation takes hold.
And the nastiness of 2000:
1. For most of the year, the industry's end-of-generation slump kicked in, with depressing sales for everyone.
2. 3dfx went under. They were one of the pioneers of PC 3D and a cool bunch of guys.
3. The Psygnosis name finally got dropped by Sony Studios Liverpool. The stretched owl is no more.
Best game? *Majora's Mask*."



Shenmue's December UK debut raised eyebrows, if only because it reached such a wide audience

SUNDAY 3
Advent

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the Edge

Titles slowing productivity this month

Phantasy Star Online

Accompanied by two four-foot Japanese schoolgirls, **Edge** set off on Naka-san's pastel *Phantasy*. The auto-translation system was helpful, naturally



(DC) Sega

Samba de Amigo

The Christmas break provided much amusement in the form of non-videogame-playing family members getting to grips with Sega's sexy maracas sim.



(DC) Sega

Bangai-O

Last month's arrival of *Sin And Punishment* revived **Edge**'s interest in Treasure-developed products. *Radiant Silvergun* will just have to wait its turn...



(N64/DC) Treasure

Dead Or Alive 2

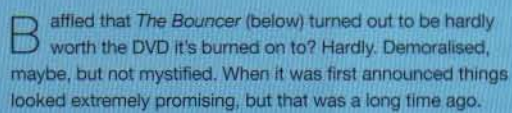
The crisp appearance and compelling counterattack dynamic continue to appeal, whatever the platform. It's nothing to do with the scantily clad women at all.



(DC) Tecmo

The third place

The Bouncer takes a kicking



Baffled that *The Bouncer* (below) turned out to be hardly worth the DVD it's burned on to? Hardly. Demoralised, maybe, but not mystified. When it was first announced things looked extremely promising, but that was a long time ago.

Since then, given the final product, the development team has presumably been sat around discussing the merits of the Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtrack (heard during the many cut scenes) rather than focusing on the problem at hand. Which is this: three-dimensional beat 'em ups are the gaming equivalent of Virgin trains – they don't really work.

To be fair, that's not an entirely accurate assessment of the situation, seeing as occasionally, like Mr Branson's rail service, one manages to leave comrades behind as it propels itself further along the playability track than others have managed.

But not *The Bouncer*. Square's title started life as an extremely ambitious project – talk of fully interactive (and reactive) environments where virtually anything could be picked up and thrown at the enemy was rife at Sony's 'A Glimpse Of The Future' PS2 announcement in March 1999. Yet, as the months passed, leaves began appearing on the track carrying the development locomotive. Almost immediately the talking stopped, with the project entering an admirable level of seclusion, even by Square's standards.

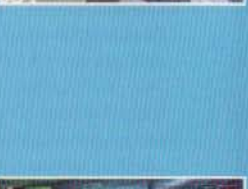
The problem with creating scrolling beat 'em ups in 3D is that without a reliable lock-on function you end up kicking and punching plenty of air. *The Bouncer*, like *Oni*, doesn't offer this, supposedly because the developer convinced itself it was on track to recreate a *Streets Of Rage* experience.

Yet the underlying aspect of the *Final Fights* of this world was simply that by placing the action in 2D much of the alignment required between two fighters to ensure feet and fists connected was never an issue – all of the fighting was undertaken in a left/right plane, requiring you to simply think about your character's vertical positioning.

Is it surprising to find that despite most genres' move into 3D, arena-based beat 'em up action remains essentially 2D? Some have toyed with true 3D one-on-one conflict (ironically, Square tried this with the poorly received *Ehrgeiz*), but the best examples have remained extraordinarily traditional. Yes, they're three dimensional characters settling their differences within 3D environments. But the fighting is very much 2D.

In their rush to jump aboard the 3D train, developers never looked back. Now and again, maybe they should.













Daytona USA 2001

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega/Amusement Vision** Developer: **Genki** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) Q2 (UK)**









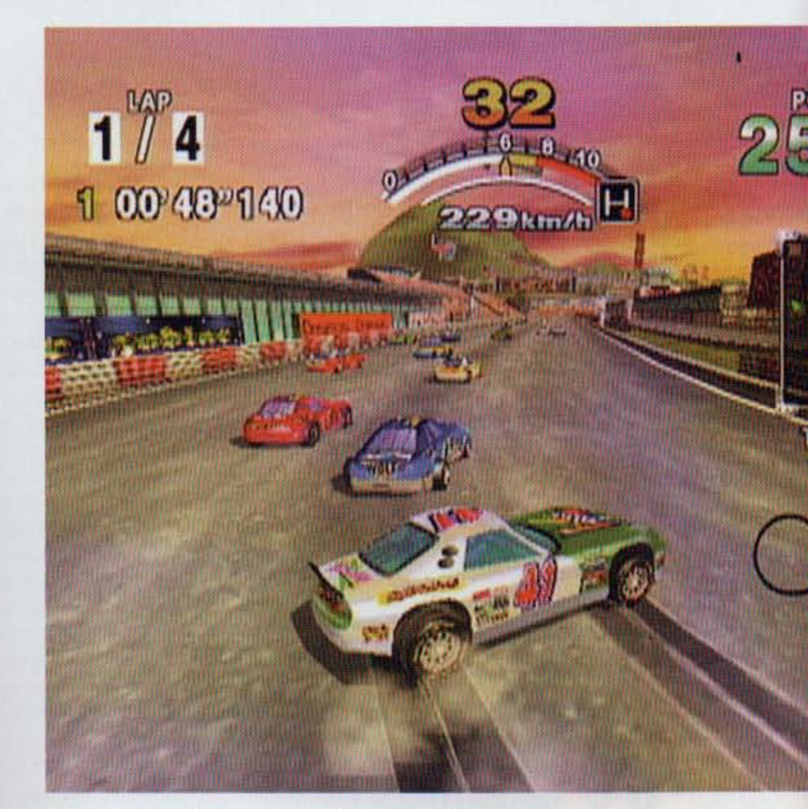
Depending on track length, laps can be altered from an all-too-brief two to a concentration-testing 40. Fun twoplayer games can include another eight cars

While it retained some of the exceptional playability of its arcade parent, the Saturn version of *Daytona* was a technical mess. Horrendous pop-up did much to undermine what should have been one of the console's finest hours.

Some 46,020 hours later, the ignition key has turned once more and *Daytona's* engine roars again. But this time the host hardware has undergone a substantial tune-up – *Daytona USA 2001* displays the true aesthetics of an arcade game. Three Seven Speedway, Dinosaur Canyon, and Sea-Side Street Galaxy from the original coin-op are remarkably convincing in their DC-powered incarnation. This familiar trio is joined by another five tracks: Desert City and National Park Speedway from *Daytona USA Championship Edition*, and new circuits Circuit Pixie, Rin Rin Rink, and Mermaid Lake. These DC-specific entries are as graphically accomplished and as charmingly coloured as their arcade-originating counterparts, mixing long sweeping curves with the obligatory technical kink or two.

All of the eight tracks are selectable from the moment the game has finished its loading duties by entering the Single Race mode. If the low number of circuits has you understandably concerned, bear in mind you get the option to race them in reverse, mirror, and reverse mirrored mode, significantly increasing the selection. True, the scenery remains the same, but given the speeds involved you really shouldn't be concentrating on anything other than the black stuff running down the middle of your TV screen and the 9, 19, 29, or 39 (depending on how many selected) other vehicles looking for a way past you.

Initially, **Edge** had trouble determining the CPU opposition as incredibly clever or disappointingly idiotic – your fellow racers appear to purposefully slam into you as you line up for corners, weave around the track in an apparent attempt to block your overtaking manoeuvre and generally make life at 300kph a little more interesting. But they could just as easily be running their



The game is a superb technical achievement – graphics are arcade-like (lower res than Model 2, though), pop-up is minimal, and **Edge** has yet to experience a drop below the super-alluring 60fps refresh rate

own race, blissfully unaware of your existence. Sadly, racing the wrong way around the track only to find them ploughing into your car having made no visibly discernible attempt to avoid it didn't reveal the sharpest racing field **Edge** has shared track Tarmac with. How convinced you are by the CPU actions should affect how much you enjoy the game: believe them to be reacting to your every move, and losing a substantial amount of places from being bumped on to the grass as you negotiate the last corner of the last lap of the last championship round resulting in your failure to qualify for the next season may be regarded as one of life's inevitabilities. Believe them to be brainless drones and you may find it hard to be as philosophical about the same incident – some will view the game as satisfyingly challenging, others may come away remarkably frustrated.

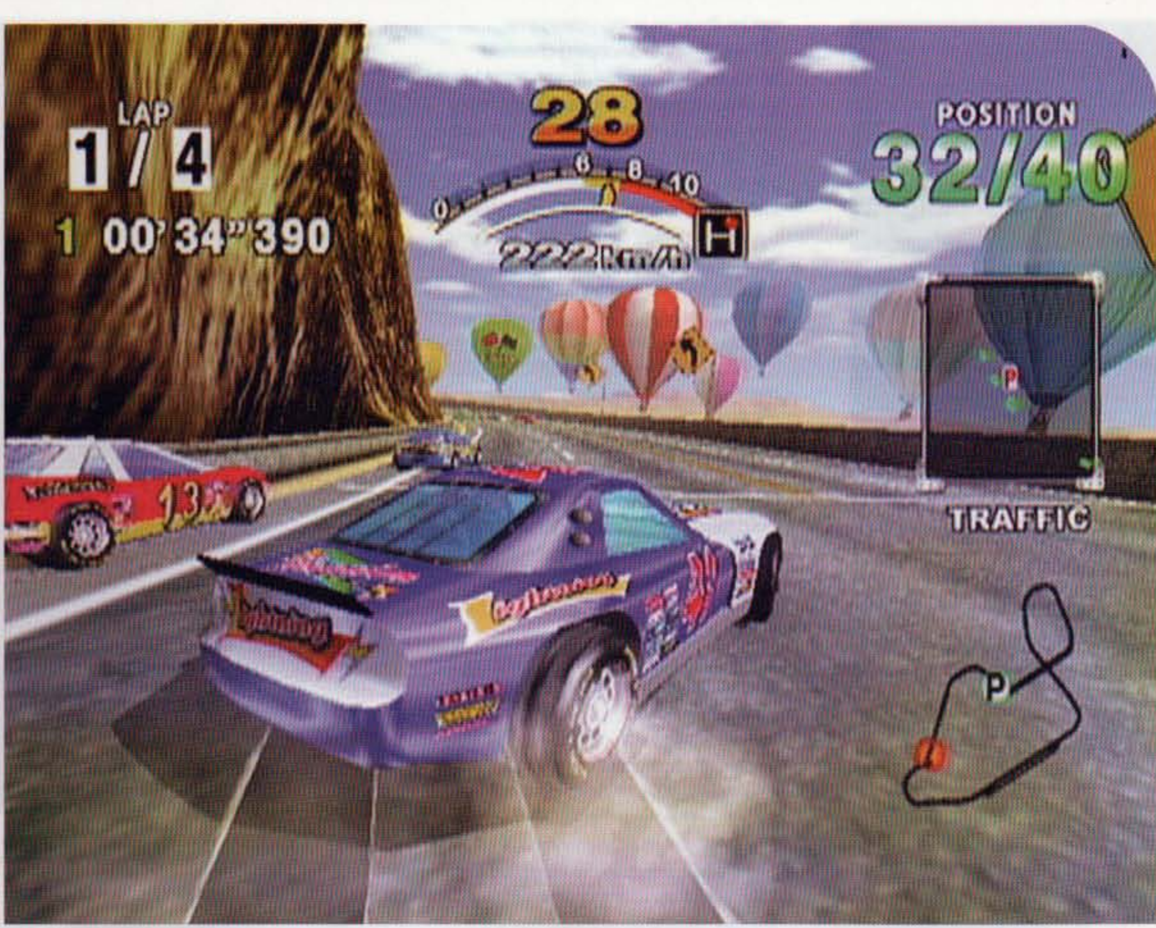
But, compared with the dent that is the control system, the AI is just a scratch in *Daytona's* bodywork. The game may look like a coin-op, but it certainly doesn't feel like one. Controlling your vehicle is likely t prove one of the more frenetic experience of your digital racing career, initially forcing you into massive powerslides when you least wish it. The system appears to be a digital/analogue hybrid, without firm commitment to either of those camps. Yes, you can alter the 'calibration' in the options screen, but all that does is increase the dead zone before the vehicle registers your desire to turn. It doesn't increase the amount of analogue travel, which is what the game crucially needs – making subtle directional adjustments at high speed is a ludicrously delicate affair. Fooling around with the settings can produce a pseudo digital-only system, which you're then forced to use with the analogue stick seeing as, bafflingly, no option is given to use the D-pad. As with any system, repetition ensures adaptation but it remains significantly different to the *Daytona USA* coin-op, which offered exemplary accurate and progressive

Replace the joypad, and *Daytona* becomes an almost perfect replica of the coin-op, offering massively enjayable and compelling racing









The Championship mode offers four seasons of four rounds each, which can prove tricky using a joypad

control, admittedly via the cabinet's force-feedback wheel.

Which is why **Edge** was delighted to find that once a steering wheel is plugged in, none of the above arguments apply. Replace the joypad, and *Daytona USA 2001* becomes an almost perfect replica of the coin-op, offering massively enjoyable and compelling racing. Its complete disregard for current videogame handling dynamics may not add anything to the racing genre but the game is refreshing in a way that *Ridge Racer V*, for example, never manages to be. It also happens to be infinitely more playable, of course, managing to recreate its illustrious arcade parent – with the essential peripheral in place, of course.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





Oddly, only the chase cam view proved suitably playable when using the joypad. No such problems when a steering wheel was set up, however, with the game suddenly reverting to all of its arcade splendour



Start your modems

One of the attractive features of this latest *Daytona* console version is the ability to race online, four at a time. However, unlike *PSO*, **Edge** wasn't able to persuade the Japanese code to work across the Internet, and hence evaluation of this facet isn't possible. As the online function should substantially add to the experience, expect **Edge** to take a look at the PAL version as soon as it becomes available.

The Bouncer

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SquareSoft** Developer: **In-house (Dream Factory)** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**







***The Bouncer* is packed to bursting point with prerendered sequences. Disastrously, however, the narrative is little better than teenage whimsy, which makes sitting through some sequences painful**

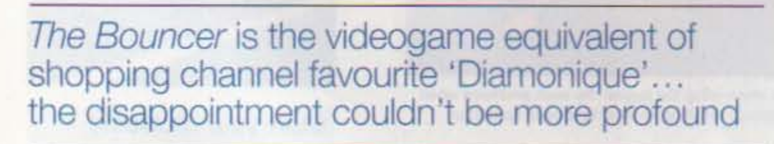
The Bouncer is the videogame equivalent of shopping channel favourite 'Diamonique'. It was hoped that Square's legion of in-house talent would produce a seminal next-generation beat 'em up adding another jewel to the company's already illustrious crown. Instead it turns out to be paste. While the reams of FMV surrounding the game may be glossy, the hollow narrative serves only to reaffirm the title's status as gaudy bauble. The disappointment couldn't be more profound.

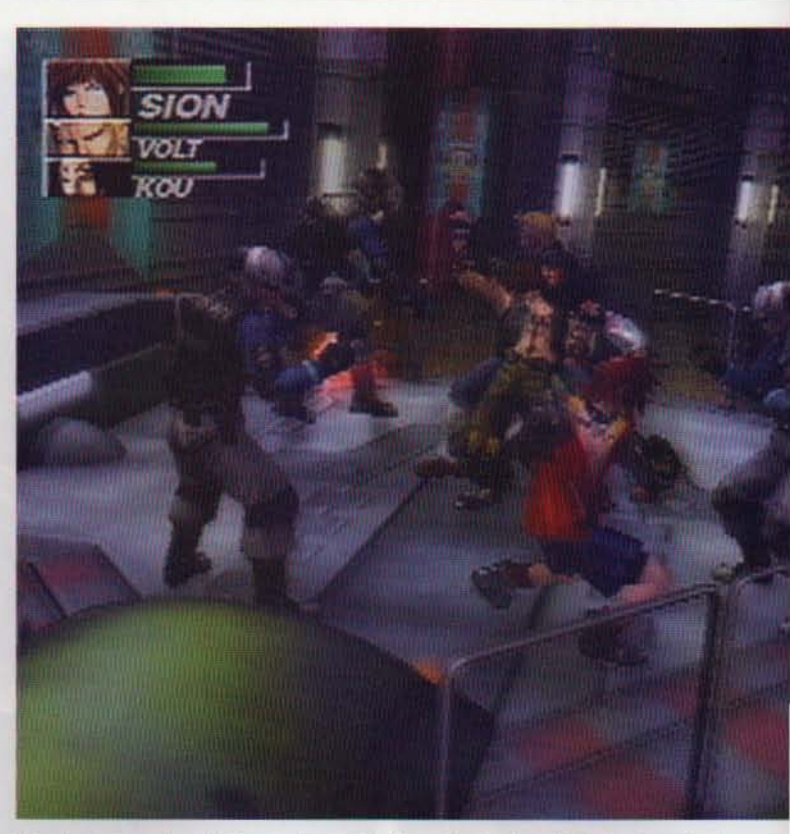
It doesn't take long to ascertain that most of the effort expended on *The Bouncer* went into the segments surrounding the core action, as the game's fighting aspects are weak in the extreme. Anyone who witnessed the early footage of characters jumping on to trains and leaping between buildings will be very saddened to learn that none of this dynamism is incorporated into the game proper.

As previous efforts to move the scrolling beat 'em up into 3D, such as Core's *Fighting Force*, have proved, the transition is not easily made. Of paramount importance is the communication of space and the implementation of reliable collision detection to enable the player to navigate and connect with opponents in a convincing and consistent manner. But Square has decided to generate 3D environments with very rigid camera viewpoints. This gives the gamespace a prerendered appearance and produces more problems than it solves. Walking directly towards the camera into uncharted territory is a basic design flaw which should now be a thing of the past, and an embarrassment on a 128bit-era title.

While the FMV is suitably cinematic, the plot is pure juvenilia, consisting of a teenage love interest interspersed with the usual revenge and loyalty motifs. The main hero and bouncer of the title, Sion Barzahd, is accompanied by Volt Kruegar and Kou Leifoh in his quest to rescue Dominique, who has been kidnapped by a sinister organisation. Though Square has offered slightly divergent routes with the three main characters, and other unlockable features for purposes of longevity, the generally poor standard of gameplay offers little incentive to explore these areas of the title.

The Bouncer is the videogame equivalent of shopping channel favourite 'Diamonique'… the disappointment couldn't be more profound





Interestingly, the analogue buttons can be used to deliver either hard or soft attacks. In practice, however, such nuances add little to the combat. Most enemies are easily defeated with simple button jabbing

The fighting moves themselves are relatively comprehensive, consisting of an attack allocated to each of the four main buttons plus a block and a special attack function assigned to a left shoulder button. A well-implemented power-up system comes in the form of extra attacks which can be bought after gaining points for enemies defeated. Yet, due to the sluggish sensitivity and a lack of sophistication in terms of blocking and counter attacking, the system fails to lift the game to even average status. The static animation of enemies linked with their tentative movements around the screen make the experience lacklustre, and at times it can feel like playing a poor *WWF* game on PSone.

Adding to this list of imperfections is the ease with which you can complete the game. An hour will probably see you through to the end, and, with the exception of the final boss, Dauragon, most enemies will be defeated with very little hardship. This rather makes the option of going through the game again with even stronger characters laughable.

The Bouncer's only saving grace is the raft of extra options available to the player who is willing to forgive the game its shortcomings. But while unlocking characters, special moves, and arenas for the Versus mode and the Survival mode add a great deal, the weak central fighting element lets everything down.

The Bouncer offers the occasional, brief glimpse of what lies ahead for PS2 games, but most will not be able to see beyond its fundamental failure to bring *Final Fight* to the 128bit era.

Edge rating: Three out of ten











Dispatch one enemy and you will receive points which can later be used to power-up your character. Combos and multiple hits will garner more points

The wonder of learning

Defeat enemies and collect points to increase your character's stats. This could have been *The Bouncer*'s premier attraction, but Sion's ability to learn, say, the Hurricane Blitz proves next to pointless. The combat is so basic that battles eventually descend into staccato block-wait-punch tedium.



Each one of the main characters has a taunt comm (R2), which, if timed correctly, can result in a combined attack on one opponent. However, the ease at which nearly every enemy can be defeated renders such a function redundant. Dispatch enemies in quick succession and you will gain point multipliers

Grandia II

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Ubi Soft** Developer: **Game Arts** Price: **$50 (£34)** Release: **Out now (US) TBC (UK)**









It would have been almost unforgivable if combat wasn't peppered with sumptous pyrotechnics, and *Grandia II* doesn't disappoint, with spells of epic proportion

The sequel to one of the better RPGs to grace the Saturn (and eventually the PlayStation) treads ground that will be familiar to anyone who has dallied with any other examples of the genre. Hidden memories, coy love interests, and characters that are archetypal to the point of being over-reductive all put in an appearance against the indispensable backdrop of an epic struggle between the starkly delineated forces of good and evil rife in the gameworld. While the impact of the title is less than stellar when placed next to both *Skies Of Arcadia* and the latest instalment of the *Final Fantasy* series, it does deliver a competent and diverting experience.

Rather than picking up at the end of the original storyline, the plot introduces a new cast of characters such as the hardbitten, cynical Ryudo (a young Geohound) and the naïve and forgiving Elena (a Songstress), who are led by circumstance into the heart of a cataclysmic struggle between Granas, the god of light, and Valmar, his sinister counterpart. Characters such as Tio, the automaton who must learn what it means to be human, and Millenia, the physical embodiment of Elena's dark side, are rather simplistic ciphers, but while the plot isn't exactly Shakespearean in its sophistication, it does an admirable job of blurring the simple dichotomies and barely fleshed-out personalities that are introduced early in the game. From Ryudo's first, seemingly routine, task of protecting Elena, the game commences a series of quests that eventually mushroom into nothing short of saving the world from the forces of darkness.

This quest-based structure runs the risk of becoming repetitive over the course of the 50 or so hours required to complete the game. Ryudo and his companions end up navigating a couple of 3D environments to reach a given destination, at which point they are invariably charged with fulfilling yet another task that culminates in a fight with one of Valmar's body parts, before the whole process begins again.

The plot introduces a new cast of characters such as the hardbitten, cyncial Ryudo, and the naïve and forgiving songstress Elena



Throughout the early part of the game, the scattered remains of Valmar, the fallen god of darkness, provide the most challenging moments, requiring considered use of the full complement of special manoeuvres

There is an almost stifling degree of linearity, and opportunities that may well have been turned into minigames in the *Final Fantasy* series are almost universally spurned. But the 3D environments do add a pleasing graphical edge, and eliminate the annoying random encounters that hamper progress in so many RPGs.

Ample incentive to complete the game is provided by a customisable power-up framework. Special Coins and Magic Coins can be collected after combat and spent on maximising spells and skills that are transferable between characters, supplementing individual special moves and basic level increases. Being able to tailor the skills available to your party of characters bolsters a combat system that is essentially the same as that featured in the original *Grandia* – which does a commendable job of combining turn-based and realtime action. A moving gauge displays the order in which characters can act, and even basic moves can cancel opponents' actions if timed correctly. Add to this a plethora of spells, items, and special moves, and the result is a satisfying element of tactical complexity.

All that's left to mention is the fairly dire voice acting, though this is only a minor complaint. A more substantial worry is that the difficulty level is consistently too low, but given the length of the game, this is almost forgivable. While it doesn't exactly forge its way into uncharted territory, *Grandia II* pushes all the right RPG buttons and levers and should find much favour with genre aficionados.

Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**



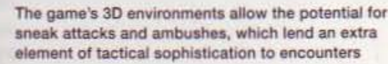












The game's 3D environments allow the potential for sneak attacks and ambushes, which lend an extra element of tactical sophistication to encounters





In the course of the struggle against the forces of darkness, Ryudo and chums traverse a truly imaginative range of locations, ranging from tribal villages to more metaphysical realms. All benefit from stunning 3D graphics, but it is a shame that longer distances are travelled simply by means of a static world map

A remixed soundtrack

Once again Noriyuki Iwadare provides the soundtrack for the game, after winning plaudits for the job he did on the original *Grandia* and *Lunar* series. Certainly over the course of the game the musical accompaniment serves to reinforce the thematic concerns of the plot and never really threatens to grate despite the game's length. But the merit of packaging an audio CD with the title, featuring the likes of Canção do povo (Little Shelter Mix) and DangerousZone, is dubious to say the least.



Giants: Citizen Kabuto

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Interplay** Developer: **Planet Moon** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**







Shops can be found in key locations across the islands. Enter one and weapons already collected can be recharged. Backpack items including a camouflage bush also prove very handy

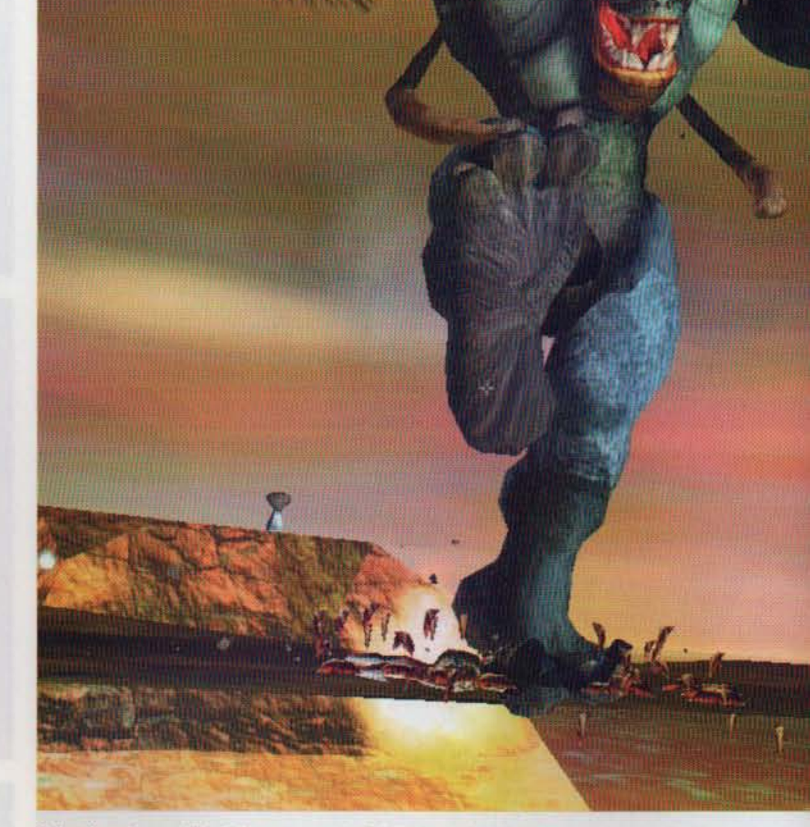
If the visuals look familiar, it won't come as a surprise to learn that *Giants* is from the same team that developed *MDK*. Like Shiny's innovative, if commercially disappointing, game, *Giants* incorporates several gameplay mechanics to great effect, and is a title which will surprise, delight, and engross the player in equal measure. Included in this tightly woven package are anything from thirdperson seek-and-destroy missions through to massive resource-management segments, and even a fun, if simplistic, *Wave Race*-style tournament. The ability to assign commands to up to five troops in the first section of the game and to guide giant Kabuto's offspring in the third segment also provide further tactical options.

The three races which comprise the *Giants* universe are the peaceful Smarties, the evil Sea Reapers, and the technologically advanced Meccaryns. Chapter one begins when the Meccaryns' holiday to planet Majorca is cut short and their spacecraft is swallowed by a giant sea creature. Baz, Reg, Tel, and their fellow Meccs are separated, and it is the player's task to bring them together while saving the Smarties from the advances of the warmongering Sea Reapers.

Life starts off very gently for the player – controlling one of the Meccs over the landscape to destroy simple targets such as a sole creature or a Sea Reaper turret. Indigenous creatures to the many islands, such as the fantastic burrowing Rippers, also provide welcome challenges to the player. Thankfully, destroying their lairs and the barracks of Sea Reapers ensures that constant respawning doesn't grate. Depth is layered into the game incredibly well, and smaller missions eventually build towards a mini campaign to rid the Smarties of their aggressors.

Depth is layered into the game incredibly well, and smaller missions eventually build towards a mini campaign to rid Smarties of their foes

Complete the Meccaryn story and Delphi, a Sea Reaper princess, becomes playable. Delphi's strength as a spellcaster and archer alters the gameplay dynamic once again, with the astute selection of spells and her magical archery abilities ensuring that her missions are qualitatively different from those of the Meccs. While some tasks are similar, the extra options afforded by her magical abilities ensure that other approaches can be adopted. Stealing a Reaperski water craft in one mission also opens up the *Wave Race*-esque section, which proves to be more than just a diverting subgame.



Kabuto's main capability is his raw strength. Buildings and Sea Reapers can be pummelled into the ground. Evil Smarties can be plucked from buildings and eaten to make Kabuto grow and gain in power

Considering that *MDK*'s title apparently confused consumers, you would have expected *Giants*' content to directly reflect its name. However, the player is kept in suspense about Kabuto and whether he will become a playable component for an awfully long time. While Kabuto's options are somewhat limited, and controlling the brute around the landscape is noticeably unwieldy, this is not to say that he isn't without his own charms. Pummelling houses to capture and eat evil Smarties is good fun for a while, but after the swift movement provided by the Meccs' jet pack and Delphi's thrust power he is simply too clumsy. *Rampage* fans may enjoy his destructive nature, but apart from the occasional novel touch – such as fashioning a magnifying glass to burn down a crystal wall – his attractions soon wear off.

There are other minor criticisms: the cutscenes, which are extremely well executed, lose their edge and narrative drive as the game develops, and there can be some annoying trekking over distances when restarting levels. It is also frustrating to spend an age in the RTS section of the game only to have victory snatched away at the last moment and then starting from scratch once more. Nevertheless, *Giants* successfully combines novel gameplay styles in an accessible way, and for that it deserves many plaudits.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**

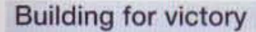
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Delphi will collect a number of spells during her adventures. These include Ice Storm, Fire Wall, Slow, Teleport, and Shrink. Unfortunately for her, the evil Raiks (top right) have much the same offensive capabilities and prove to be frightening opponents. Much thought and tactical nous is required throughout



Building for victory

Reach the end of a major chapter in *Giants* and a novel base-building exercise rounds things off. It is the most demanding section of the game, and successfully combines RTS-style resource management with foraging and sniping capabilities. Collect Smarties to make them build your bases (which range from spell schools to generators), then find food to keep their energy levels high. The Sea Reapers will make attacks on your base, but fend them off for long enough and you can eventually release an all-out assault to destroy their HQ and win the game.











Once the Reaperski has been stolen Delphi can enter tournaments. Waypoints must be passed through and power-ups in the form of speed boosts and missiles can be collected along the way

Oni

Format: **PC (tested), PS2** Publisher: **Take 2 Interactive** Developer: **Bungie** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now (PC) February 23 (PS2)**





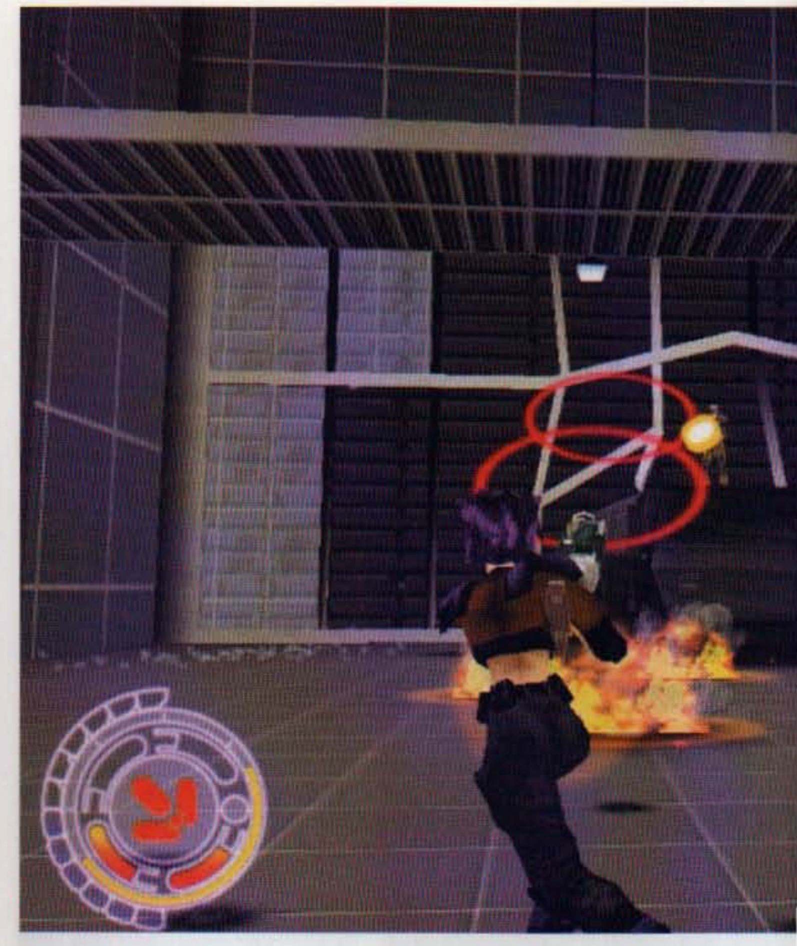


Guns are useful, but if the enemy gets too close they'll easily disarm you. *Oni's* emphasis is on fighting at close quarters, away from the vogue for sniping action

It's tempting to dismiss *Oni* as just another Croftian attempt on undersexed PC gamers' wallets. Not because of any particular chauvinist signals within the game – female lead Konoko is neither wildly misproportioned nor particularly underdressed – but from the literature accompanying **Edge**'s review copy. 'As you can see, I am just as well stacked as the next girl... with weapons, that is', declares the PR blurb, leaving the overwhelming feeling that you've seen it all before. You haven't, and *Oni* deserves better.

Why? Because it tries something different, and it succeeds. If Take 2 was only interested in a marketable heroine, it'd be easy enough to follow the *Tomb Raider* model, and casual glances at the screenshots here might indicate the developer has done just that, producing another jump'n'run title illustrating PC creatives' obsession with the 'realistic' platform game. But it's actually spiritually closer to a scrolling beat 'em up, with emphasis firmly on one-on-one close combat rather than executing pixel-perfect jumps.

Despite the game's anime stylings, first impressions reveal the world as nothing more than functional. There are none of the curves and splines symptomatic of newer 3D engines, and texture detail is noticeably weak. Regardless of whether this is a deliberate move on developer Bungie's part to render the game in a simplistic cartoon style, or something inherent in developing a game simultaneously on both PC and PlayStation 2, it makes *Oni* look more empty and featureless than it actually is. The visual sparseness is also detrimental to the level design, which rarely confuses while conveying an epic scale. *Jet Set Radio*-style cel shading would suit *Oni* perfectly, but as it is the washed-out gameworld contrasts starkly with the gorgeous cartoon stills.



The yellow arc in the bottom-left-hand corner of the screen points out the direction the player ought to be heading in. The arc widens as Konoko gets closer to her intended objective. It's an effective element

> *Jet Set Radio*-style cel shading would suit *Oni* perfectly. As it is the washed-out gameworld contrasts starkly with the cartoon-style stills



Cutscenes tell the story of Konoko's progress. A comic-based approach may have worked better

Fortunately, *Oni*'s combat system is much more attractive. It's initially simple, intuitive, but ultimately there's a depth and exuberance to it that's lacking in so many PC games. A left click on the mouse executes a punch, right click a kick, but the impact of both depends on your direction and situation. Combos are also increasingly important, implemented by following the instructions that reveal themselves in your diary. The first one you learn – two left clicks, followed by a right – causes your character to finish with an airbound spinning kick, and demonstrates the satisfaction of timing a move perfectly. It shows players exactly what's possible, and challenges them to not just destroy enemies, but to destroy them with style.

Guns are available, too, but ammunition is sparse, and their impact isn't as devastating as it might be. In fact, it's perfectly balanced: while it's a slight advantage to have range weaponry, lacking it never wildly tilts the odds against Konoko. A well-timed kick or punch is usually enough to knock the gun from the grasp of the enemy, just as they can cause you to drop yours. If a weapon does end up on the floor, combat becomes a tumbling race to get to it first, still guarding against blows, still attempting to trip your opponent.

And that's the best part of *Oni*: it might not be the most structurally aesthetic game,







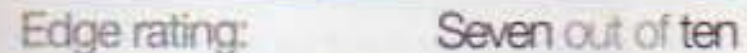


The polygonal surroundings are crude and sparse, but tactically the levels are reasonably well designed. Forethought will help progression



Clouds illustrate successful attacks. The colour of them depends on the health status of the attacked

but the fighting can seem beautifully choreographed without ever impinging on the player's freedom of action. It's entertaining and convincing; the lack of a Z-lock is disappointing, and learning to block takes some getting used to, but they're minor quibbles in a dynamic that's inherently simple and absolutely addictive. While not a wild departure from the norm, Bungie has succeeded in putting a different spin on the thirdperson action/adventure genre, and that deserves to be applauded. Take 2's marketing doesn't. Konoko clearly has iconic potential, but it's not because she's a gorgeous girl: it's because she's in a good game. The sooner the industry appreciates that, the better.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Low blows

In true beat 'em up style, success in *Oni* means learning how to block as well as execute the multi-hit combos. Helpfully, Konoko's stance defaults to block, so providing you've not ordered her to do anything else, she'll deflect the majority of blows aimed at her upper body or head. It's a lot like a 2D fighter, but it's when low attacks need blocking that things get confusing. Pressing the crouch key isn't instinctive – hardcore *Street Fighter* fans will press the 'down' key instead, which causes Konoko to start running backwards.







Kengo

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Genki** Developer: **Light Weight** Price: **¥6,800 (£40)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Light Weight's staff are fighting purists, and purists have always sought realism within the genre, something removed from the jump and kick strategies of *Street Fighter*. That's one of the reasons the developer's following considered *Bushido Blade* such a success, dependent not on an array of special moves but on quick thinking and a developed, intelligent gameplan. Another reason for the devotion to the PlayStation sword fighter was that *Bushido Blade* discounted ten years of gaming history, and did away with energy bars entirely.

Kengo, Light Weight's 128bit return to the martial arts arena, places the player in 18th century Japan, and gives them a wooden shinai – or steel blade in the more brutal one-on-one modes – with which to forget a reputation. Though a basic Vs dynamic exists, the substance in *Kengo* comes from the oneplayer mode, which charges the player with developing a character through combat and a range of simple subgames.

The fighting relies on a simple and intuitive control system. One button executes a configurable sequence of three attacks, another parries, and a third blocks. The shoulder buttons switch between various stances, each of which houses a different sequence of the definable attacks: the enemy AI is impressive enough, and you'll often witness your opponents backing off, changing their stance, and attacking you with a more appropriate sequence. Victory in *Kengo* relies on timing and strategy rather than out-and-out aggression. It's also rather too dependent on the absolutely precise positioning of your character.

Fans of the *Bushido Blade* series will notice that the much-vaunted instant kills are far rarer, but the real change here is the reintroduction of the life bar, a move that takes much of the tension from the potentially terrifying combat. Knowing how close you are to death provides some kind of security: that absolute, final, cutting blow rarely comes as a surprise any more. Players who wish for an easier time might find the move an improvement, but that those hooked by *Bushido Blade*'s in-combat structure will doubtless be disappointed. Despite the subgame distractions, the atmospheric ultra-realism and the addictive speed-chess dynamic, the jump to PS2 has only served to take Light Weight's noble ambition another step away from purity.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

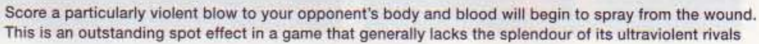












Score a particularly violent blow to your opponent's body and blood will begin to spray from the wound. This is an outstanding spot effect in a game that generally lacks the splendour of its ultraviolent rivals



The introductory FMV is splendid, suitably conveying *Kengo*'s mystical feel with the help of meditation, rushing waterfalls, and an evil spirit



The spiritual mission

The subgames within the oneplayer mode, used to boost the player's basic statistics, offer a welcome distraction from the concentration needed to succeed in the core game. The first tests your rhythm-action skills in order to break a plank of wood in two, while another sees you hammering buttons beneath a waterfall, dressed in nothing more than a digital loincloth. Meditation requires you to balance a marker in the centre of the screen; if it slips too far to the left or right, a lurking monk hits your character squarely on the top of his head.

Sky Odyssey

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **SCEI (Cross/XAX Entertainment)** Price: **$50 (£33)** Release: **Out now (US) April (UK)**

Having spent many more hours with it since first sampling *Sky Odyssey* at last year's ECTS, it's pleasing to find the title has retained much of its initial charm.

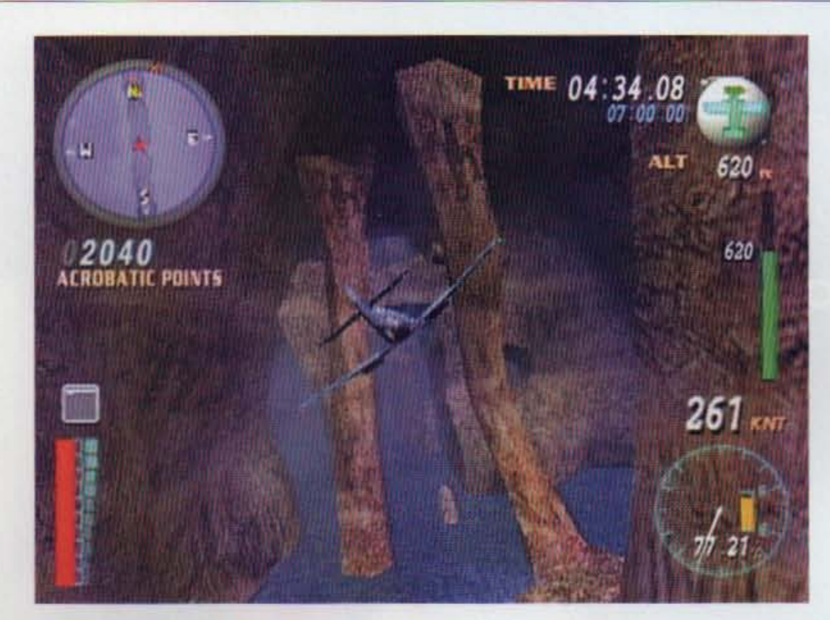
As one of several adventurers who do all of their adventuring from the cockpit of their favourite flying machines, it's your task to piece together an ancient map revealing the way to the Lost Tower of Maximus. Acquiring these pieces requires you to undertake some 40-odd missions based around an archipelago. So, for instance, you may have to save an out-of-control balloonist from a crushing encounter with the side of a mountain by attaching ballast to his rig, bringing it down to Earth safely. Or deliver supplies to the base camps of fellow explorers. Or negotiate an A-to-B route through wing-rippling weather.

Along the way you can customise your aircraft with pieces of equipment you get to pick at the end of a successful aerial venture. These include more aerodynamic canopies, more powerful engines, speed-boosting wings, and more. Determining which particular piece to equip before a mission is down to your personal flying style, naturally.

While experienced pilots may beg to differ, the dynamics here appear well conveyed, altering according to a particular plane's handling characteristics. There is an easy option, but a far more interesting experience is offered by the normal control method, which allows full command over pitch and roll through turns – with a little practice you'll soon be performing aerial powerslides.

It's all good fun, but the very nature of exploring seemingly deserted islands can make things feel a little impersonal and lifeless, and the bland graphics don't help get much character across. More importantly, certain elements become disappointingly repetitive, such as the retrieval of the map segments which essentially simply follows the same setup, regardless of scenery change. In its defence, the game does offer a variety of modes while also managing to convey the feeling of battling the elements with aplomb – there's genuine anxiety felt as you brush against the sides of tight canyons, fighting to regain control of the situation. It's also noticeably different to anything else out there. But it's not the most exciting offering around, either. Still, it remains refreshingly compelling and certainly merits a look.

Edge rating: Six out of ten





A broad canvas

In addition to the Adventure, Training, and Free Flight options, a Target Practice mode sets a number of floating objects which must be destroyed before returning to the ground. But this isn't as seductive as the Sky Canvas mode: starting off with remarkably simple shapes requiring simple bursts from your smoke machine, things soon progress to complex images demanding dexterous flying. As with the main game, everything is graded, thus encouraging replayability.













While the various aircraft (around ten bonus examples exist) are reasonably modelled, scenery is poorly textured and displays a remarkable lack of interesting features. Also, slowdown occasionally creeps in, while draw distance is unimpressive. It's not bleeding-edge stuff, although the changing weather is well done

Sonic Shuffle

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **In-house (Smile Bit)** Price: **$40 (£27)** Release: **Out now (US) TBC (UK)**

Videogame mascots are often used to justify B-grade spin-offs, either to extend their appeal or simply to swell the developer's coffers – that's well known. However, as risible as such efforts can be, the occasional gems surface, such as HudsonSoft's *Mario Party*, which has clearly influenced *Sonic Shuffle*.

Sega's story revolves around a newly fashioned creature, Void, stealing the Precioustones, which leads to chaos in Maginaryworld. Called to help, each player picks a character and advances around the game board according to the hand of cards they are dealt. Each card represents a number of moves, the player able to advance or retreat. Landing on a space can trigger one of a number of effects: rings are awarded or removed, battles based on card values are fought, and miniquests, such as the rescue of a beached dolphin, are undertaken.

Until the first Event space is encountered, wherein lies a bundle of minigames involving all four players, the game experience is somewhat lean. These minigames include participating in a rock concert, attempting to commandeer the only parasol on a sunny beach, or simply breaking down a series of doors as quickly as possible. However, while these are all representative of the short-lived yet kinetic nature of the tasks, *Sonic Shuffle* singularly fails to deliver what could be considered true gaming thrills.

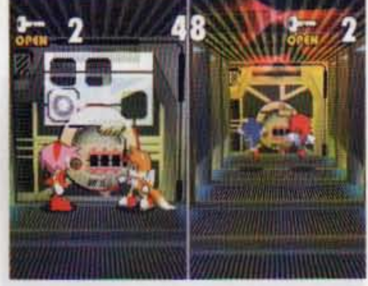
The problem doesn't so much in the game design, but with the gulf that exists between boardgames and electronic entertainment. Traditional names such as Hare And Tortoise or the archetypal Monopoly demand a pensive, sober approach, which aren't necessarily desirable ingredients for good multiplayer videogaming. Whether playing human or CPU opponents, *Sonic Shuffle*'s turn-waiting deadens the experience, and traversing the board swiftly becomes a tiresome process in lieu of Event spaces. Even the 'party game' tag seems at odds with the game's leaden pace.

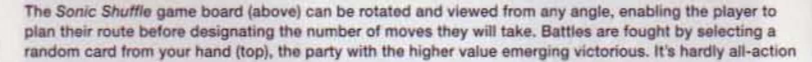
Were it not for the cel-shaded visuals and faithful characterisations, *Sonic Shuffle* could easily be dismissed as imitation. There are moments of genuine hilarity, but ultimately, the game is dull. Under the dark shadow of *Sonic Adventure 2*, this tepid, diluted affair will have difficulty proving itself, even to franchise stalwarts.

Edge rating: Four out of ten








The *Sonic Shuffle* game board (above) can be rotated and viewed from any angle, enabling the player to plan their route before designating the number of moves they will take. Battles are fought by selecting a random card from your hand (top), the party with the higher value emerging victorious. It's hardly all-action



Cel shading revisited

Sega's artists have created a sumptuous hand-drawn effect by employing the cel-shading technique that made *Jet Set Radio* so visually striking. The routine ostensibly renders any textures over the target polygons with little relief shading, lending a basic, cartoonish look to the graphics. And yet, despite the inclusion of such a generous texture RAM, Dreamcast still displays clipping artefacts, though not to any real detriment.



Event spaces are where the game comes to life. In this game (above), sitting under the bomb until the last minute proves particularly amusing

Cool Boarders: Code Alien

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **UEP Systems** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£40)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**













The trick tracks feature several dedicated half pipes, something pointedly missing from *SSX*. Despite the more restrictive trick system they're entertaining, and the scoring system is well-executed, too, marking you on various aspects and illustrating your progress with a radar diagram

Snowboarding Combined

As well as offering you the chance to beat your fastest time down each hill, or to try and and amass ridiculous numbers of points on the jump courses offered, *Cool Boarders* lets you enter Snowboarding Combined. Touting itself as the world's most respected snowboarding event, it sees you begin by competing in a trick event, the results of which translate into timed headstarts in the subsequent race. The game also offers a chance to earn various grades of licence by completing a variety of tasks across the mammoth pistes.

Rather than go all out to rival the excellent *SSX*, the latest in the *Cool Boarders* franchise takes a different approach. By carving whole mountainsides using Sony's hardware – similar to the final unlockable level of EA's overstated snowboarding caricature – UEP Systems has based its boarders in a more realistic environment. This is a game dynamic based around subdued physical accuracy rather than any kind of gravity-defying hyperactivity.

So, where *SSX* forgives mild misalignments on landing, *Cool Boarders* will have you take a momentum-killing tumble, and where EA's effort has a wildly improbable but entertaining tricks system, *Code Alien* eschews instancy and improvisation in favour of forethought and timing. Try and pull off a flip without a big enough build-up or with too little speed and you'll fail, no question. The switch in pace will come as a shock to experienced PS2 boarders, but it's worth persevering, because UEP's ethic has its advantages.

Though graphically spartan, the snowscape is intensely atmospheric, due in part to draw distance, but also because the sense of slicing through thick, powdery snow has been so well recreated. Icy sections are executed brilliantly, too, and are far superior to its rival's low-grip frozen rivers. The *SSX* sky-blue colour scheme is dropped in favour of a greyer, more lifelike ethic, and though it gives the game a paler, almost greyscale image, it also produces some gorgeous vistas. Particularly rewarding aesthetic moments arise thanks to the varying weather systems: fogging's a commonly accepted get-out clause for weak processor power, but watching high-altitude cloud cover dissipate as your snow-clad charger scythes down the mountainside comes as a pleasant surprise.

Unsurprisingly, there's a catch. Gaining an insight into the subtle gradations of control, absolutely key to cutting your way down the increasingly suicidal powdered rockfaces, is frustratingly difficult. There's just not the depth of manoeuvrability *SSX* offered, and, regardless of whether this is a step in a realistic direction or not, it makes it a worse game. A shame, because in the face of such strong opposition, *Cool Boarders* almost succeeds. It's reasonably entertaining, and impeccably presented, with a deeper and more varied structure than *SSX*. But it's not nearly as much fun: reality binds it to the mundane, and that's its final undoing.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Unison

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Tecmo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£40)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

"Bring back smile by Soul Dancing!" declares the box. "World is waiting for *Unison*." Well, probably not the world – rhythm-action games may have little more than a cult following in Europe, but their popularity in Japan ensures a wealth of titles that western hardcore dancers can choose to import. This, Tecmo's spin on Konami's Bemani stranglehold, brings an additional element to the dancefloor: dedication.

Where the Konami games that dominate the genre are more a test of reactions and co-ordination, *Unison* requires the player to memorise increasingly difficult sequences of analogue-stick manipulation, then repeat them with no visual aid whatsoever. It's a test of memory, rhythm, and co-ordination. It's just like real performance dancing, without the physical effort and public humiliation.

During the practice runs through each song, circular markers point out what your analogue sticks should be doing and which way you are actually moving them, but once the performance has begun they disappear. Initially this causes panic, but providing you've worked on your routine hard enough, the moves become instinctive. While your actions don't always correspond to the same moves throughout each song – sometimes throwing the left stick to the left may send your character's left arm to the left, while other times their whole body moves – the connection between the two is strong enough to make the onscreen action make sense. It also means you'll commit the actual dance steps to memory as well as your own thumb twisting, and be practically unstoppable in the street discos of Akihabara.

As a game dynamic it's functional, and success is satisfying, but it's also hard work. The satisfaction comes more from relief than entertainment, because the effort required to remember the sequence of wrist-twisting moves while keeping cool enough to execute them is too much. In the end, this takes the sheen off the attractions of the innocent marshmallow graphics, and *Unison* less enjoyable than time spent with its pick-up-and-play cousins. While this is the logical – and exhausting – conclusion of the listen/repeat dynamic, and is a brave attempt at something different, the persistence required means it's unlikely that many dancers will find it to their tastes. It raises a smile, but if the world really is waiting for a rhythm-action game, it's not *Unison*.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



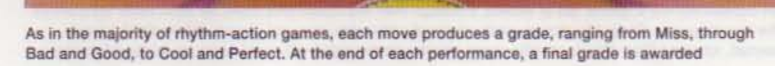






Your tutor, sporting the most well-animated afro yet seen on PS2, takes you through the steps





As in the majority of rhythm-action games, each move produces a grade, ranging from Miss, through Bad and Good, to Cool and Perfect. At the end of each performance, a final grade is awarded



Step back, Sugababes

The near-incomprehensible Story mode sees the player assume the role of one member of a three-girl dance team, and proceeds to bust moves through a variety of songs. Each piece is split into several segments, which must be correctly executed before moving onto the next. Once all of the segments have been memorised, you allowed to practice the entire song as many times as you desire, before moving to the one-shot pressure of the live arena. There are no prompts, no directions – there's just the music, and the joypad, and an absolute fear of failure.

Guilty Gear X

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Arc System Works** Developer: **Sammy** Price: ¥5,800 **(£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**





A picture, as they say, paints a thousand words, and this is certainly true of *Guilty Gear X*. It takes time to ignore the flair and just enjoy the game



Light fantastic

Perhaps the greatest achievement in *Guilty Gear X* is the quality of its lighting effects. The developers have managed to create an array of routines that seem to do for 2D what *Soul Calibur* did for 3D, the high-resolution display enhancing the effect. Of course, cosmetic beauty may not be directly proportional to content, but there is a definite sense that Sammy has set a precedent, one that Capcom needs to be very aware of. A VGA monitor will adequately show how stark the differences really are.









Each combatant has a similar set of moves, although their manifestations make for noticeable differences in the way they play. Projectile moves, while obviously desirable, may not always deliver the leverage expected, whereas Zato-1One's middle-range attacks (above right) will easily keep an opponent at bay

Capcom and Sega can be considered to have a stranglehold on the 2D fighting market, due to a certain legacy and the sprite-handling capacity of both Saturn and Dreamcast. It is therefore a bold move on the part of Sammy to enter such a genre.

But despite its lacklustre PlayStation origins, *Guilty Gear X* is quick to impress, chiefly due to its visuals: sprites are drawn using Dreamcast's 640x480 mode, resulting in pin-sharp artwork. No other title looks quite this inviting, as the design is also outstanding, mixing de rigeur beat 'em up styling with the genuinely baroque. Each animation, no matter how insignificant, is executed with maximum flair, transparencies and colour working almost to excess. *Guilty Gear X* is a visual delight, if nothing else.

Playing reveals familiar fighting mechanics, the use of bladed weapons following where *Samurai Showdown* trod so successfully. Punch, kick, slash, and high slash provide the basics; quarter circle and forward/back actions lifted directly from *Street Fighter* territory. As well as a chargeable Tension Gauge, there is also innovation in the form of a self-explanatory Instant Kill function, as well as the chance to cancel an opponent's charged attack, albeit requiring precision timing.

As intuitive as it is, those of a Capcom bent may find *Guilty Gear X*'s motion marginally slow. This is, of course, in comparison to the former's penchant for hyper-kinetic action. Sammy's brawler is rapid enough, but not to ridiculous levels. Learning to pace and plan, rather than play by instinct, divides the two, perhaps explaining the game's graphical graces – a more steady rate of play will seem more rewarding when overdriven effects are employed so readily.

Once you get more familiar with the game, the depth of play becomes apparent, each character individual enough to warrant careful selection. Power and speed have been evenly distributed, a failed attempt to activate an Instant Kill leaving the player drained of power, thus defenceless, irrespective of class.

That *Guilty Gear X* may suffer a certain chronological snobbery is an inevitable reality. But ultimately, the fact that it is not *Street Fighter* is the bait that should entice most fighting disciples, no matter how devoted they are to Capcom.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Win Back

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Koei** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Initially touted as a challenger to *Metal Gear Solid*'s shoot-and-stealth crown, *Win Back*'s 1999 entry into the N64's thirdperson shooter market ended in disappointment. Though the game wasn't dreadful, its limitations starkly contrasted with Koei's extravagant claims, and a weak draw distance left those craving another *GoldenEye* lost in the thick grey fog. The embarrassing inability of your special agent character to work his way past waist-high barriers was irritating, too, but the real problem was the chronically flawed chase camera.

It's worth reiterating, though, that *Win Back* wasn't dreadful – just flawed, conceivably due to the limitations of the host machine (though Joanna Dark might disagree) – and presumably it's this that's spurred Koei into producing a more polished version for PS2. This isn't *Win Back 2*, more version 1.1, with hero Jean-Luc of government do-gooders S.C.A.T. still treading the same well-worn path in the fight against international terrorism.

In truth, that path's more reminiscent of something like a slightly more pensive *Time Crisis* than *MGS*. Jean-Luc stalks around each linear level downing terrorists, collecting power-ups, and dodging bullets. It's standard fare, then, rendered diverting by *Win Back*'s strongest gimmick. By pressing square, Jean-Luc's back locks to the nearest wall, and holding down auto-target will cause him to swing around the corner and aim at the closest foe. It adds a cinematic element to a game that otherwise lacks any sort of involving atmosphere.

Draw distance is better than the N64 version, naturally, but it only serves to reveal the textures, models, and level design as disappointingly bland. Those loyal to the N64 will be pleased to note that PS2 owners have to suffer the problematic controls, too: the camera is still abysmal, now controlled by the right analogue stick. Moving it to a position that suits the current situation involves near-constant readjustment, hardly conducive to the flowing action-film atmosphere the game seeks. In the end, it's nothing more than a glossy rerelease of a still-flawed title: all the transfer to PS2 has done is accentuate *Win Back*'s weaknesses. The game's a seriously questionable purchase now, but when *Metal Gear Solid 2* arrives, it could well be rendered absolutely obsolete.

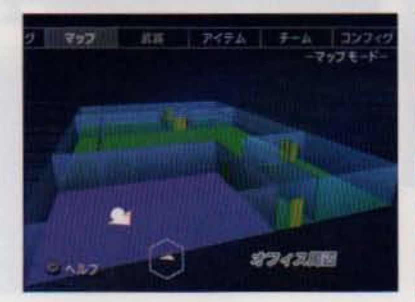
Edge rating: Four out of ten

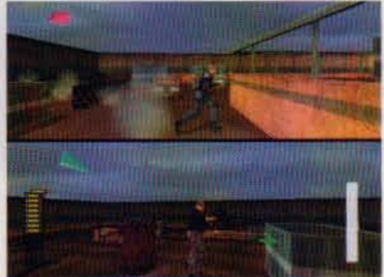












The 3D map is impressive, allowing the player to rotate a clean representation of their surroundings. The multiplayer mode is fun, too, with different types of fragging fun on offer, including a lethal game of tag



Pressing R1 locks your target to your mercenary enemies automatically, meaning it's relatively simple to pop out from cover, fire, and hide again



Poor animation

The update-not-revamp policy continues in the character movements. Jean-Luc's running animation is horrendous, more reminiscent of a Chocobo from the *Final Fantasy* series than any kind of special agent. Given that the bulk of the game is spent studying his stilted wooden sprint, it's quite an irritation. Whether this is because Koei has used models from the original *Win Back* and simply retextured them is besides the point – the result is far below what owners of a new-generation console ought to expect.

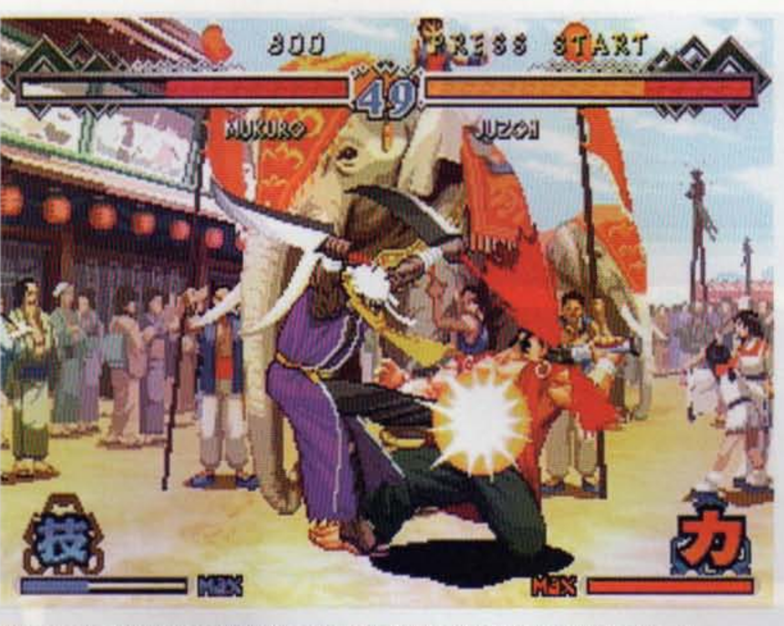
Last Blade 2

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **SNK** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**





Proximity to your foe is a key concern in *Last Blade 2*: get too close and you'll be beaten on a regular basis. The CPU foes veer to the toughest end of the scale



There is nothing that can be considered amiss with *Last Blade*'s visual style, other than the fact that it is hampered by archaic resolution and framerates, a sin both SNK and Capcom are guilty of

In spite of its flamboyance, SNK's *Last Blade 2* seems particularly dull when compared to *Guilty Gear X*. Still, invest a little time and you'll discover hidden merits, albeit of the traditional kind.

A straight port of the coin-op, there is little that impresses visually. The graphics, while expressive, are let down by lifeless animation, not to mention unflattering resolution. Those weaned on *The King Of Fighters* will not be swayed, though – gameplay values are what count.

Last Blade 2 replaces fists with weapons, and an immediate observation is that proximity to your opponent is key. Remain too close and you'll pay the price, especially given the harsh difficulty level. At the easiest of eight settings, SNK expects the player to know his or her stuff, with button-bashing ineffective.

Character variation is predictable, from lumbering to lithe, and a Repel function can be used to good effect in a crisis. Ultimately, however, *Last Blade 2* only serves as a skeletal example of the genre, offering competent thrills, but with little to no style. Gameplay may remain sacrosanct, but lavishness should never be underestimated as a virtue.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Mech Warrior 4: Vengeance

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **FASA** Price: **£30** Release: **February**

In the terms of the elder statesmen of electronic entertainment, the last half year has been characterised by gamers having a choice between imaginative but deeply flawed games such as *Hitman*, *Project IGI*, and *Vampire*, or polished games with a complete deficit of vision. The latest iteration of the *Mechwarrior* franchise falls into the latter category.

However, this isn't to say it isn't solid, worthwhile entertainment with the kind of cerebral spin on the action game format that has characterised the series. In terms of design and AI *Mechwarrior 4: Vengeance* surpasses the previous patchy iterations. The same fantasy simulator approach – treating a fantastical premise as if it were real – still adds a certain heavy-metal authenticity to the world, at the expense of some thrills. But, at its core, this is essentially the same game as the title that first appeared more than a decade ago.

There are only so many times you can shoot the legs off a giant robot before a shout of triumph becomes a shrug, but at least it isn't yet a sneer. While this remains state-of-the-art PC entertainment, you can't help wishing that the PC had chosen an art that was a little more interesting.

Edge rating: Six out of ten





While there have been some improvements in the game's design and AI, *Mechwarrior 4* is fundamentally the same game as its predecessors



Despite its cityscape game environments, *Mechwarrior 4: Vengeance* never feels like genuine urban conflict due to the lack of ephemeral detail delivered by FASA, which limits your suspension of disbelief

ISS Pro Evolution 2

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house (KCET)** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) March (UK)**

The primary merit of *ISS Pro Evolution 2* is that any given match can degenerate into a goal-free, hit-and-hope war of attrition – just like the real thing. In contrast, EA's *FIFA* isn't football: it's soap. Shorn of build-up play and tactical substance, its sterile end-to-end battles smack of an over-produced highlights package. In contrast *ISS* embraces the less camera-friendly aspects of the sport, and perhaps the most remarkable fact about this update is that Konami has chosen to take it further away from *FIFA*'s all-action aesthetic.

Whether you favour a thoughtful, intelligent build-up, or aim for a lanky target man, the individual nature of each player and an unrivalled tactics system makes every match a distinctive event. To run a winger past three opponents represents a sublime moment of virtuosity – skill counts for something in *ISS*.

Rather than a mere seasonal revision, *ISS Pro Evolution 2* has the feel of a sequel and is without doubt the finest football game on any format. It remains to be seen, however, if Konami has the stomach to finally challenge *FIFA*'s commercial pre-eminence with a high-profile marketing spend. Frankly, the game deserves no less.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten



The *ISS* series has long enjoyed the support of virtual footballers looking for more a more realistic sports experience, but if *ISS Pro Evolution 2* is to challenge *FIFA* for sales, Konami will have to market it hard





Konami has tied *ISS Pro Evolution 2* even closer to the dynamics of the real game, and as such it is even harder to score

Truck Mania Concerto

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£40)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**



Your strictly timed adventures are often impeded by rival trucks. They'll try and ram you from the road, and their health is indicated by a five-bar display. Collisions between vehicles are predictably unrealistic





Bizarre pseudo-hellish levels and an improbable jump across a raising bridge do little to improve *Truck Mania*'s chances of making the leap to the UK

Widespread appreciation of Japanese esoterica is made even harder when worthy games don't appear in the west, so **Edge** regularly likes to trawl foreign release schedules looking for a gem.

Namco's wonderfully titled *Truck Mania Concerto: Rodeo's Love And Sorrow* isn't one of them. Its simple structure sees you hurtling around increasingly ethereal circuits, trying to reach the end of each stage before the timer runs out. Firmly rooted in Japanese culture graphics-wise, it's not that the dynamic is particularly poor – albeit one more suited to a Mega Drive game than something from a next-generation console – it's the handling that's truly atrocious. Actually, it's worse than that: it's almost completely absent, like a passably animated Game and Watch system.

The game has been promoted with a shot showing the truck leap, 'Speed'-like, over a gap in a bridge. When that moment happens it's actually predominantly scripted, and the adrenaline hit isn't close to any of the rushes in the Keanu Reeves flick. In fact, the game's closer in spirit to Spielberg's TV movie 'Duel'. It's an improbable truck nightmare, and one that the harsh east-west filter will doubtless discard.

Edge rating: Two out of ten

Rhyme Rider

Format: WonderSwan Color Publisher: Bandai Developer: Nana-On-Sha Price: ¥3,500 (£20) Release: Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)





Though there are only a few levels, object randomisation within them means *Rhyme Rider*'s longevity is slightly increased



Hitting the note spot on produces an avoidance animation and a brief passage of music, which leads to the appearance of a rapid sequence of objects which form companion tunes to the main soundtrack

Nana-On-Sha has always depended on style and innovation to stretch the longevity of its Bemani-style games. The gloriously strange *Rhyme Rider* takes its inspiration not from the listen/repeat dynamic of *PaRappa*, but the reaction rhythm of *Vib Ribbon*.

Keroncan makes her way through four Matsuura-composed tunes in much the same way as Vibri the rabbit skips through CD collections. Obstacles appear in her way and, if the player manages to press a button at the right time, she'll jump over them. Fail, and the song skips back a bar and provides another chance.

Where *Rhyme Rider* has the edge over *Vib Ribbon* is in its use of sound. Avoid one of the ultra-surreal barriers and a signature noise will play. Successfully clear a rapid sequence of obstacles, and these sounds forms a tune that fits neatly over the top of Matsuura's mini dance numbers. It's cute, and it helps immeasurably with the rhythm component of the game.

Of course, despite the randomised nature of the obstacles, *Keroncan* is a short-lived joy, and it's seriously handicapped by the WonderSwan's lack of a headphone socket, but it's unquestionably enjoyable while it lasts.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Gunpey Ex

Format: WonderSwan Color Publisher: Bandai Developer: In-house Price: ¥3,500 (£20) Release: Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)

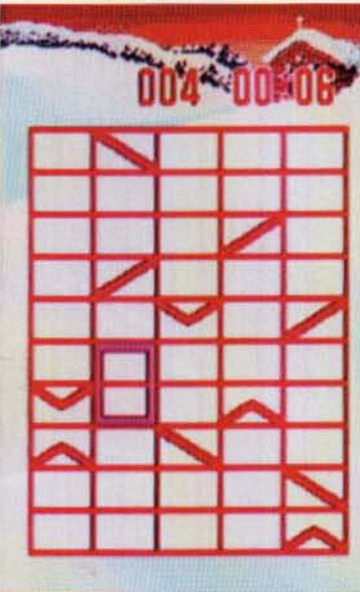
Bandai needs this. *Tetris* sold the Game Boy, and while it's *Final Fantasy* that's currently shifting WonderSwan Colors in Japan, it's not unreasonable to assume that if the small and perfectly formed handheld is to have a longterm future, a killer puzzle game has to be part of the plan. *Gunpey Ex* is the company's first attempt, a reasonably addictive game based on a simple premise. Lined tile segments in each of five segments must be arranged to form a clear link from left to right across the screen. Extra points are gained if all pieces are of the same colour, something that becomes less important as the game's pace increases.

Four different play modes form the oneplayer experience, with twoplayer also being available via cable link-up. But each is a victim of repetitive strategy, and there's also no look-ahead; fast thinking helps, but too much of *Gunpey* comes down to chance, and where most similar puzzle games will let you work around the lack of a particular tile, here bad luck is fatal. It's still diverting, but it's no *Tetris*, and if the WonderSwan Color is going to truly challenge Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, Bandai will need something much stronger.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Making your left-right connection entirely from one colour isn't essential, but does score you bonus points





Puzzle mode gives a selection of pieces and asks you to form a connection that uses all of them at once. The continuous mode is more punishing, constantly scrolling your pieces towards the spikes at the top

Financiers befriend gaming

Livingstone Guarantee offers a little City nous for the videogame industry

Livingstone Guarantee partner Jeremy Furniss

LIVINGSTONE GUARANTEE

That the financial community has difficulty understanding the games industry is evident from the instability experienced in the share prices of companies such as Eidos and SCi over the past year. "It has been a bit of a rollercoaster ride," says **Jeremy Furniss**, head of the games team at corporate finance boutique Livingstone Guarantee. "Partly this has been self-inflicted, because companies have come to the market with over-optimistic forecasts. And I think that has been compounded by a lack of understanding of the business models and certainly of the technology cycle. The market has been very unforgiving of the transition year."

While the subject of financing may appear to be out of place in Codeshop, that five major UK games groups are planning to float on the stock exchange underlines the fact that being a successful developer is no longer just about making great games. The videogame business is finally becoming a proper business.

"I have long been a passionate gameplayer and going back three or four years I become more curious about the industry," explains Furniss. "For 12 months I tried to understand the dynamics of the business, pressed the flesh, met a lot of people to ask ignorant questions and get up the learning curve. It soon became clear to me that here was a blossoming marketplace. No one in the conventional financial community had any real inkling of its scale, and therefore there was an untapped market."

Already a partner at Livingstone Guarantee, the biggest mergers and acquisition boutique in the UK, Furniss set about starting a team specifically focused on games. Now four people strong, it includes Tim Christian, formerly of Hasbro Interactive and Microprose.

"We see ourselves as a catalyst," Furniss says. In 2000, it organised the sale of *2000AD* and its IP to Rebellion, oversaw the acquisition of *Internet Football Club* developer Caffeine by Rage for £3m, as well as selling Planet Distribution to French company Big Ben. "There's a long lead time in what we do, so there's a lot of plotting and strategy before the transactions actually occur," Furniss says. Within six to 12 months, though, he expects to be completing a deal a month. Most recently, the boutique raised capital for Friendly Giants, a developer of content for emerging platforms such as handheld devices, interactive TV, and Web sites.

Attracting investments isn't easy, however. Investors aren't swayed by innovative game concepts. They want to see profit, cash flow, track record and growth before they will sink their money into a project. "A typical scenario for us has been an impoverished developer looking to break the mould which wants to raise the funds to create its own content.



Livingstone oversaw the sale of *Internet Football Club* developer Caffeine to Rage

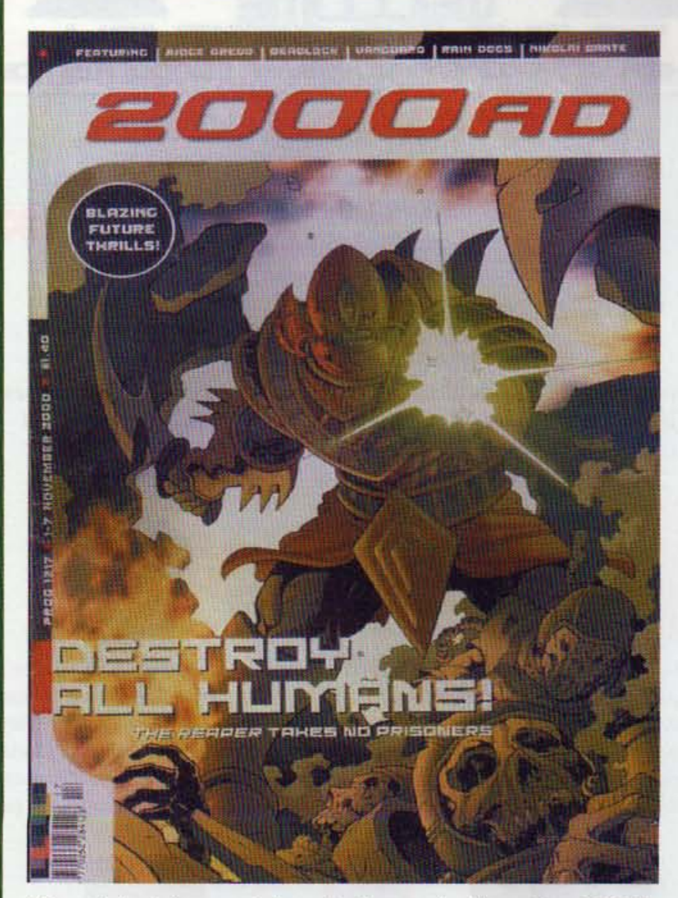
And the reality is that we are not set up to help those sorts of people," Furniss says. "We are in the business of raising £3-£20 million, not the first £1.2m."

As he sees it, the biggest challenge for developers in the future will be managing growth. "I think the most benign thing at the moment is bigger budgets, and the opportunity with a bigger budget is to make profit, which is what developers have always complained publishers haven't allowed them to do," he explains. "The bigger the budget, if you are effectively managed, you will make profit, which means you have a viable business, which means venture capital people will come along and say, 'You are making profit and therefore I would like to invest in you'."

For that to happen, though, developers should be looking to bring managers into the business. "I think the Darlings are a great example," says Furniss. "They have learnt through their mistakes and managed the business accordingly, and secondly they have actually imported management into their own business. Growing developers need to recognise the importance of professional management. Growth is the fundamental risk and the opportunity."

Yet Furniss reckons it will still take five years before the mainstream finance community understands games. "It's the only industry I know where you can spend 18 months developing a game, spend £1.5m of someone's money, and the box will go on the shelf on Sunday night and by lunchtime Monday you'll know if you have a success," he marvels. "That's what scares investors, and you can see their point."

URL
www.livguarantee.co.uk



A Guaranteed sale: the corporate finance boutique organised the purchase of *2000AD* by Rebellion Software, but classes itself as more of a 'catalyst' than an instigator

Opening a new chapter

UK developers go pro as part of the International Game Developers Association

IGDA London chapter chairman Jonas Eneroth (right); IGDA London secretary Michael Weissmuller (far right)

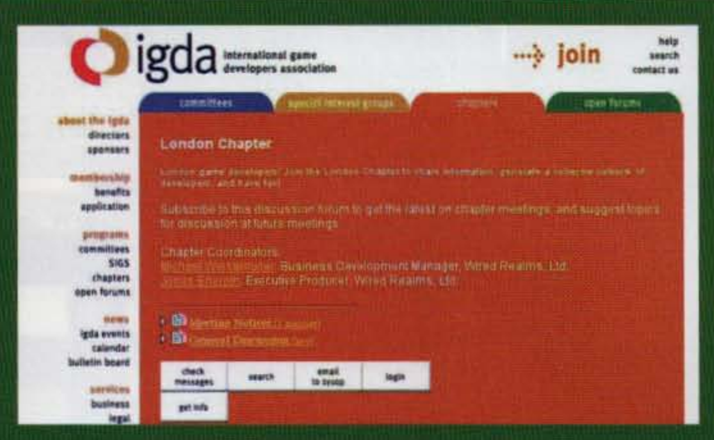




Predictably, the formation of the London chapter of the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) grew out of the social networks that underpin the game industry. Also known as 'drinking buddies', it's something the IGDA is keen to encourage.

"I knew Jason Della Rocca (former Matrox developer relations manager and now IGDA program director) from way back," explains **Michael Wiessmuller**, London chapter secretary and well-known advocate of a 'friendly pint'. "I phoned him up to see how he was doing and he said, 'I'm working for the IGDA. How about you and Jonas becoming London chapter co-ordinators?' I said, 'Sorry, I've got too much work on,' [Wiessmuller and Eneroth both work in start-up developer Wired Realms]. But he said 'Go on'. I finally agreed and that pretty much was it," Wiessmuller says. The IGDA had arrived in the UK.

Well established in the US, the IGDA is a non-profit professional organisation by and for game developers. ION Storm's Warren Spector and Factor 5 president Julian Eggebrecht sit on the board of directors, and its mission is to build the game development community, and, more generally, support the industry at a developer level. Regular meetings are held locally, while membership benefits include reduced rates for conferences such as the Game Developer Conference, as well as discounts on magazine subscriptions, hardware, and more esoteric offerings such as legal advice and health insurance. It also hosts a number of special-interest groups on subjects as varied as game violence, mobile gaming, game audio, and 3D graphics, the latter chaired by Kaboom Studios' technical director Fred Gill.



The International Game Developers Association is a professional organisation for developers

The IGDA hosts a number of special-interest groups both on and offline, such as mobile gaming, 3D graphics, and videogame violence

"The IGDA is exactly what is missing in this country," enthuses Wiessmuller. "There's ELSPA, but that is publisher oriented."

"Some games companies are very social, but a number aren't," continues London chapter chairman **Jonas Eneroth**. "It would be nice to have the opportunity to meet people in the local industry more than a couple of times a year in order to expand your contacts, do a bit of networking, and bring back the fun factor. I think to have some type of forum is very valuable investment."

First up for the London chapter will be a brainstorming session to see what developers want, however. "It can be fine balance between the super-geeky usergroup and something a little bit more casual and more rewarding that helps bind a community together," explains Eneroth, drawing on his previous experience from the Chicago chapter, gained when working at Bungie. "But we're not running the London chapter," says Weissmuller. "Everyone that becomes a member has as much say in the running as us."

Despite the obvious focus on developers, the IGDA is open to anyone in the business of making games. "The people who are really organised are marketing and sales – they have every meeting under the sun, so why not give developers the same opportunity?" says Eneroth. "The IGDA isn't meant for sales and marketing, but everyone is welcome."

"We also want people on the peripheries who want to break into the industry – junior programmers, junior producers," Wiessmuller adds. "That way they can actually meet people who work in the industry, get some advice, maybe get a job."

While the geographical reach of the chapter is only Greater London, plenty of interest has already been shown, with staff at HotGen Studios and Eidos particularly quick off the mark. "I booked this room in a pub that holds 40 people, but I've realised it might not be enough," says Weissmuller. "So I've called back and made provision for a room for 100 people, just in case."

Paying your dues

Although the cost of an international membership of the IGDA is $110 (£73), the London chapter is negotiating a specific deal for the UK. The final cost is expected to be around £35 a year. In the main, this is because most of the benefits of IGDA membership are only valid for US residents, although Eneroth is keen to set up similar deals in the UK in time.

Two up-and-coming events in London will be offering a discount for IGDA members, however. There's a 15 per cent fee reduction for the Mobile Games Convention (March 12-13) and a 20 per cent reduction for the Interactive TV & Mobile Games Conference (February 19-21). Members will also gain a $50 discount on registration fees for the Game Developers Conference held in San Jose in March, and subscription to *Game Developer* magazine.

URL
www.igda.org/chapters/london.htm

Web gaming gathers pace

WildTangent's compression and streaming technology allows developers to use the Web like a CD

WildTangent producer Paul Steed





URL
www.wildtangent.com
www.sabrewing3d.com

Its next trick

Proving that the Web waits for no man, the *Web Driver* SDK is already undergoing an upgrade from version 1.0 to version 2.0. Of particular interest is the inclusion of *WT Studio* – a BSP standalone editor for creating *Web Driver* content. This is designed to ease tasks such as rendering, lighting, and implementing sound, as well as streamlining the editing and preview processes. Other additions to *Web Driver 2.0* include the ability to export geometry and motion from *3D Studio Max* and polygon-perfect collision detection. The next priority is a multiplayer component, which is currently undergoing testing.



Ironically, considering the success of Alex St John's graphics API, when Microsoft cancelled the DirectX guru's next project, he promptly decamped and set up under his own steam in an office down the road. Two years on and WildTangent is well on track to ensuring its technology does for 3D interaction on the Internet what DirectX did for PC games. Its *Web Driver* software pre-empts broadband, and allows online multimedia content to be compressed, streamed, and cached on a user's PC with minimal waiting, even over a 28.8Kps connection. Simply put, WildTangent says it's in the 'virtual bandwidth' business.

"There are a wide range of markets where WildTangent's technology can be utilised: music, data visualisation, and enterprise are just a few," explains producer **Paul Steed**. The current big push, however, is on the gaming front. And if Steed's moniker seems somehow familiar it's because until eight months ago he was an animator at id Software, working on *Quake II* and *III*. A public falling out over future direction with John Carmack resulted in his relocation to Seattle and WildTangent. Another recent recruit from the traditional gaming space has been Phil Shenk, former lead artist of *Diablo II*.

"The main reason veterans like Phil and I came on was because we were tired of the bloated teams and bloated timelines for delivering products," Steed says. "WildTangent's technology allows us to develop a playable prototype game idea in a short time and have it in people's hands quickly via Internet delivery. Imagine if *Quake III Arena* had been released as three equal instalments over a period of 18 months instead of one big game in the same timeframe. Consumers would have been even happier with the product, the revenue model could have been the same, and important user feedback would have been received even sooner."

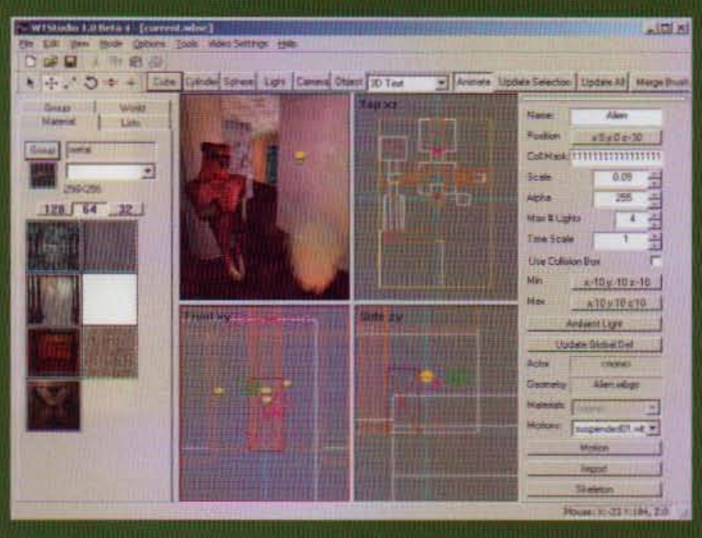
Key to *Web Driver*'s performance is its compression technology. "It uses three to four different types of compression for 3D animation," says Steed. "These techniques are tuneable, allowing developers to trade off quality for enhanced compression. This makes *Web Driver* content scalable for a broader range of users. There is also additional compression (both lossy and lossless) that can be utilised after the content is created, making the file even smaller." Compared to the size of an original *3D Studio Max* file, Steed reckons that compression ratios better than four to one are easily achievable.

The other main aspect of *Web Driver* is the way it streams content as it's required. "The initial download to get a game started is typically from 80K to 400K," Steed says. The minimum specification users are required to have is *DirectX 5.0*, *Explorer 4.0*, or *Netscape 4.5* and *Windows '95*. Once the initial download is complete, the game's assets stream in as the user plays.

"These assets can be anywhere from a couple of kilobytes up to a couple of megs," says Steed. And while some of the early games were the typical 2D Web-style affairs, WildTangent has been picking up plaudits for its 3D content. The game *Sabrewing* has been nominated as a finalist for the Independent Game Festival. Phil Shenk's episodic *Dark Orbit* is about to go live in early February, too.

Even WildTangent's business plan is tuned to encourage developers to get onboard. The *Web Driver* SDK is free, and a licensing fee for published content is only levered on the publisher (ie, any Web site on which a *Web Driver* game is hosted).

"We have the full range of developers from recognised professionals to garage-band amateurs using it to create killer content," Steed boasts. *Web Driver* is compatible with programming languages such as C++, Java, and anything else that supports COM. "Instead of it taking two to three years to develop a game with a huge team, one to two people can create retail-quality products in two to four months," he says. It won't be *Doom III*, and that's the point.



Currently available as a free download, WT Studio is a standalone world editor for BSP geometry



An early use of WT technology is RC Riot, created for Radio Shack and available at Microsoft's zone.com



LithTech's next step

From PC firstperson shooter to crossplatform, online toolset

LithTech VP business developments Jeff Hutt



In the scramble by publishers to release games as quickly as possible, some of the biggest winners have been 3D engine developers. But while the prestige of the *Quake III* and the new *Unreal* engines are well known in the PC space, relative newcomer LithTech has been shipping titles of late, too: *No One Lives Forever*, *KISS: Psycho Circus*, and *Sanity: Aiken's Artifact* to name a few. Unlike its rivals, it's not just gunning for the PC; consoles are firmly on the agenda as well.

"Some of our competitors focus on game development, which limits their ability to provide adequate support," says **Jeff Hutt**, LithTech's VP of business developments. For, while LithTech emerged from developer Monolith, the engine side of the business is separate. It does not develop content, only extends its technology and makes sure the customers are satisfied – after all, support is the major concern for any middleware licensee.

"Other companies do not have the development resources to keep up with the progress of our quarterly upgrade program," Hutt explains, concerning LithTech's 50 staff. "Other technology licensors provide graphic rendering solutions, but fall short of delivering complete technological solutions that are comparable with the LithTech Development System (LTDS)." With 26 licensees and authorised developers currently onboard, LithTech seems to be doing the business.

The key technical advantage for LithTech is its engine's modular design. Within the LTDS, various platform-specific options are available. The PlayStation2 module has been released and is already being used to port *No One Lives Forever*. The XBox module is being developed in conjunction with supporting DirectX 8 for the PC and should be completed in the autumn. The platform-independent structure of LTDS means that XBox developers can begin working on games now, according to Hutt.

"We are trying to keep the API as platform independent as possible, but a lot of the code is custom for each platform," he explains. "For example, the upper half of the renderer is comparatively abstract, setting the transformation matrices, defining the view frustrum, and checking visibility. The lower half varies depending on the platform, since it is formatting the platform-specific data as well as sorting and queueing it in an optimal manner for that processor." In this way, LithTech hopes that both PlayStation2 and XBox content will run as efficiently as possible within the constraints of those particular machines.

Looking to the future, LithTech's quarterly upgrade program will receive a boost when the LTDS version 3.0 is released at GDC in March. Hutt plays his cards close to his chest on specifics, but flexibility seems likely to figure prominently as a buzzword. "With version 3.0, developers will be able to remove components and add in thirdparty technologies with much greater ease," he says. The move towards console development has also resulted in an important cultural shift as LithTech looks to better support developers who don't want to use its technology for firstperson games. "We are looking at other categories like racing and sports games, while figuring out how to add better camera support and splitscreen capabilities," he says. "We are committing a lot of energy to broadening the capabilities of the LTDS and our target market."

As for one of the other big talking points of the past six months – deformable environments à la *Red Faction* – Hutt is more sanguine. "We have thought about this. Some of the new terrain features we are working on may support deformable environments, but it will be within a fairly constrained set of limits. We are going to move into this area slowly because of concerns regarding performance and how much change the environment can stand before it starts impacting other parts of the game."

The online component

LithTech's forthcoming online module is already being talked up as the killer app. An extension of the core technology, it will come in various flavours. The basic online and LAN multiplayer will be overshadowed by specific solutions for online-only gaming and massively multiplayer universes. In keeping with the crossplatform nature of LTDS, both narrow and broadband connectivity will be supported for PC, PlayStation2, and XBox.

The initial upgrade for online functionality will be included as part of overall licence fee, currently somewhere between $50,000 and $250,000, depending on the level of support required. The massively multiplayer module will probably end up as a separate offering, however.

URL
www.lithtech.com





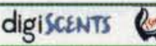


Recent games powered by LithTech include *Sanity*, *KISS: Psycho Circus*, and *No One Lives Forever*. The crossplatform nature of the engine is underlined by *KISS*'s appearance on Dreamcast and *No One Lives Forever*'s forthcoming PlayStation2 debut

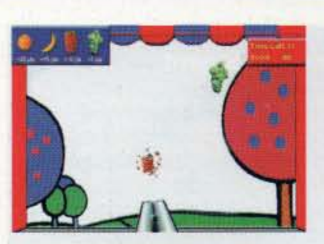
That's scentertainment

US company DigiScents believes smell technology will come up smelling of roses

DigiScents founders Joel Bellenson (right) and Dexster Smith (far right)







An obvious application for smelly games would be Web-based Java games involving food – but how to smellify a title like *Deus Ex*?

URL

www.digiscents.com

http://developers.digiscents.com

DigiScents believes its ScentWare technology is as revolutionary as the introduction of sound to silent film. Whether the impact of smell stimuli to gaming will actually live up to those high expectations is open to question, but what isn't is the fact that DigiScents is dead serious about its work.

Founded by Joel Bellenson and Dexster Smith, the spark for DigiScents was created while the two vacationed on a Florida beach. 'Wouldn't it be great to broadcast the aroma of the ocean and the fragrance of suntan lotion', they thought. Primarily designed for Web applications, the focus on games, or 'scentertainment', has come with the arrival of director **Ralph Thomas**. Previously at Sega America, where he wrote the Audio64 API for Dreamcast, Thomas had also been director of audio programming for SSI/Mindscape.

"Scent is a powerful new vehicle for communication and self-expression," he says. "Scent adds to the realism of a game. It adds a fourth dimension to virtual reality." So, could scent have a similar impact on gaming as that of 3D audio?

"Game engines will become more scent aware with the creation of 'line of scent' algorithms that will function in a similar fashion to line of sound algorithms, but with a different attenuation matrix," says Thomas. "This will enable the player to smell an enemy prior to its attack. Entire games that are conducive to smell will quickly appear, as has been the case with sound."

One of the biggest issues for scent designers is the persistence of smells, particularly some of the more poorly vented bedrooms where games are played. For this reason, three levels of scent intensity can be emitted, and one of the main uses is expected to be mood generation.

First shown at GDC, the ScentWare SDK allows developers to test the technology. Containing sample code and documentation, the SDK supports both C++ and Java. A separate ScentMixer tool is needed to create scents, but the crucial part of ScentWare's success will be the release the iSmell Personal Scent Synthesiser, which generates the odours. The launch is scheduled for summer 2001, with the units retailing at under $100 (£67), and will be supported by Web site snortal.com. Various design concepts have been mooted, with the 'sharkfin' winning most plaudits. The speaker-sized device plugs in to a USB port or serial connection, and contains a replaceable inkjet-style scent cartridge.

Diary of a videogame

Elixir wires *Republic: The Revolution* for sound

Elixir diary, part 25
by designer Joe McDonaugh



The first PC I owned didn't have a sound card and I couldn't have cared less because sound wasn't exactly the PC's strong point. This has changed considerably over the last few years. At Elixir we believe that future advances in game music and sound will, in time, be considered to be comparable to the 3D graphics revolution of the mid '90s.

Nick Sturge, our tools manager, is in charge of audio for all of Elixir's games, and this month has agreed to talk about sound and *Republic*.

"With this game we want to depict the epic events that shape a country's future, and your rise to power within that country. To create the immersive experience that conveys the scale of these events, music and sound effects are critical.

"Early on we decided to work with an external sound effects artist and composer and we chose Richard Joseph and James Hannigan. They are, without doubt, two of the best and most experienced musicians working in the games industry, and have worked on some great games like *Barbarian*, *Defender Of The Crown*, *Speedball 2*, *Mega Lo Mania*, *Sensible Soccer*, and, more recently, *Croc*, *G-Police*, and *Theme Park World*. They were nominated for a staggering four BAFTAs at this year's awards (Best Sound: *Theme Park World*; Best Sound: *Cannon Fodder*; Best Music: *Theme Park World*; Best Music: *FA Premier Football Manager '99*).

"Using external people has a number of benefits. Firstly, you'd be hard pushed to get people of this quality to come in-house. It also means that we didn't need to build an expensive soundproofed studio in our offices. There's also the question of flexibility; in the early stages when the design was still being finalised there wasn't enough work to keep them busy full time. Now there is more than enough.

"Producing audio isn't the only part of the process; someone needs to code it into the game, and that's where I come in. I'm principally a programmer, and most of my work is on *Republic* and its design and development tools. However, as well as being quite technical I have a background in classical music, and was very keen to take on the audio programming. The main part of this work has been customising how the different sorts of audio will be triggered and played: we need support for one-off effects, repeating effects, area-based sounds, and the music playback code itself. A good overview of the project is also important, as I need to work with the artificial intelligence, animations, and camera control to ensure that effects are triggered correctly.

"Audio technology has certainly seen interesting developments recently and we must decide what technologies to use and how to deliver the audio in-game. With potentially tens of hours of gameplay, simple linear CD tracks could quickly become dull and repetitive and would occupy a lot of valuable space on the CD. Microsoft's DirectMusic offers exciting possibilities, but also offers problems because it randomises music. If you create a track with a lot of possible variations, the system might randomly play something quite unpleasant to listen to. Instead we have been looking into ways of achieving a similar effect in a more controlled way by coding this ourselves. We have also had to consider what 3D sound and proprietary hardware support we want to include, and what this will cost us in terms of processor usage.

"A lot of action within the game revolves around in-game characters talking to one another. We have various choices here. We could duck out and not have any speech in the game at all, but this would have been a real shame as speech is an important means of conveying a lot of emotion that would otherwise be hard to get across. At the other extreme, we could go for complete actual speech, where we script out everything any character might say within the game, record it, and play it back appropriately. This would involve a huge amount of material not to mention the issue of language. Which language would it be in? *Republic* is set in Eastern Europe, so we could pick a language and then prepare material in that language, or do it in English. We chose an intermediate solution, which was to have speechlike noises that don't actually mean anything. *The Sims* did this quite well, and the results we've had so far are very promising.

"By far the most important aspect of audio design is for it to integrate seamlessly into the whole game experience. We have decided on special music to accompany the actions, for maximum cinematic effect. As well as conveying the scale of events, this also emphasises the emotions and atmosphere, be it for a massive political rally or an SAS-style raid and assassination. The sound effects must tie in with the animations as well as providing a good background environment. Richard has put a lot of work into creating authentic sounds. He's gone to amazing lengths to achieve this – for example, so that the cars sound right he tracked down the Trabant Society of Great Britain and went off and recorded the sound of a real Trabant engine. This is the level of excellence that we're aiming to achieve with *Republic: The Revolution*."

"We chose an intermediate solution, which was to have speechlike noises that don't mean anything. *The Sims* did this well, and the results so far are promising"

Republic's in-game action will be enhanced by externally sourced audio





The making of…

Lemmings

True to the adage that success has many fathers, failure none, Dave Jones, Scott Johnston, Mike Dailly, and Gary Timmons recall their influence on a classic

Format: **Amiga/various**
Publisher: **Psygnosis**
Developer: **DMA Design**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **February 1991**



Here's a teaser: how do you get through the Steel Mines of Kessel without bombing too many Blockers in the upper chamber? Clearly, not an everyday kind of question, but on its tenth anniversary such queries are still being posted on countless *Lemmings* fan sites across the Net. But what accounts for its popularity so long after its initial release on February 14 1991?

Lemmings clearly has that rare *Tetris* touch – the ability to appeal to hardcore and mainstream gamers alike, and ignore any sense that videogames appeal only to a niche demographic. Its immediacy and simple design was something which even the most technically inept parent could relate to, and, without question, it converted many to the joys of puzzle gaming. "It was great to make a fun game," recalls *Lemmings* designer **Dave Jones**. 'The fact that it was so simple, yet the levels could be deceptively tricky; people picked it up instantly – any age, any gender. Most of all, though, it was a fresh idea."

The title's enduring popularity among both mainstream and dedicated gamers is largely due to the simple core game mechanic. Preventing an unrelenting line of characters from falling to their deaths was an immediately compelling and understandable concept. In an industry which regularly produces software which stimulates the instinct to destroy, *Lemmings* was unusual in its insistence on making the player preserve life.

Attribution of credit for the *Lemmings* concept depends upon who you speak to, but its inspiration seems to be part experimentation among programmers, and partly a eureka moment for Jones. DMA coders **Scott Johnston** and **Mike Dailly** had an argument about how small a sprite could be and yet still retain character. Johnston believed



Quake and *Wolfenstein 3D* may have courted controversy, but *Lemmings*? The Deep South was shocked by the imagery on certain levels

that it could go no lower than 16 pixels; Dailly thought he could go down to eight. "It all happened in a day," explains Jones. "It was to be the third game I had written, and came about when one of the programmers at DMA had created an animation in *Deluxe Paint* that showed a bunch of little guys walking up a steep slope, and being blasted at the top by a big gun. The animation constantly cycled around, with a bunch of these little guys being blasted. I just thought – there's a fun game in that."

While Dailly clearly won the bet about the relationship between size and practicality, it was lead animator **Gary Timmons**' job to refine the personality of the lemmings. As he explains: "The challenge of the animation was in getting the player to believe he is really seeing the lemmings as illustrated on the box cover, and not just a small bunch of pixels. Part of this suggestion was to make the feet and hair look floppy, and that was a lot of fun to work on. Usually game character designs come before the sprites. With *Lemmings* the sprites were essentially completed before any concept art or design was done. When I came up with the look for the lemmings I tried to make them cute and vulnerable-looking. I wanted them to come across as quite mindless, and I think the change from the solid-colour eyeball in my first drawings to the sleepy eyed expression helped to achieve that."

Jones reveals that *Lemmings* was far from a meticulously planned concept: "The game was built up bit by bit rather than designed from the outset. Because it was very unique, there was nothing to benchmark it against." And, like Mario's dungarees, one of the most distinctive features of the lemmings – their green hair – was down to saving time at a technical level. "I reduced the number of colours to three [two-, bit planes] so they could be used as sprites in a game with many onscreen at one time," says Timmons. "The lemmings have their distinctive green hair because it was easy to just slide the RGB sliders in *DPaint* to values for green and not have to spend time deliberating over colour."

"A programmer at DMA had created an animation that showed little guys walking up a steep slope and being blasted at the top. I thought – there's a fun game in that"

Without question, *Lemmings* illustrates one of the most basic design principles: simple elements combining to produce complex interactions. This complexity derived from the capability to assign professions to the tiny lemmings to overcome the many perils put in their path. "It developed as we went along," discloses Timmons. "We all chipped in ideas for skills for the lemmings, and then I had to animate them to see which ones worked best. I tried to put life and humour into the animations. For example, the Miner had to appear to be putting effort into his work and the Basher was meant to look like he had big, heavy fists."

Eventually eight professions were created: Climber, Floater, Bomber, Blocker, Builder, Basher, Digger, and Miner. While tall rock pillars could be overcome by having a Basher dig horizontally through its structure, lava pits and water hazards might require Builders to place bridges over their treacherous expanses. It was the vast combinations of these functions which made *Lemmings*

such an innovative title. And, with 120 levels ranging from Fun through to Mayhem, it made for a supremely challenging package. Further *Lemmings* updates from DMA, such as *Oh No! More Lemmings*, plus countless custom levels designed by fans, have conspired to keep the *Lemmings* legacy alive.

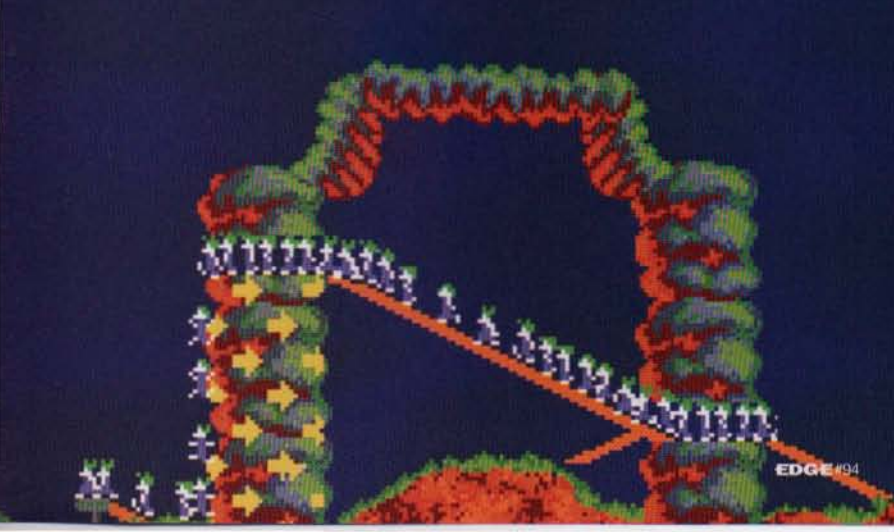
The purity of its design was clearly an inspiration to many, but back in 1991 it enabled the programmers to expend all their efforts on creating the many fiendish puzzles. "There was very little that I wanted to do that did not make it into the game," recalls Jones. "Level design was crucial, but we had a very good editor built into the game, and some talented level designers on board." More seasoned gamers will also have noticed levels modelled on DMA's previous titles, *Menace* and *Shadow Of The Beast*.

"Technically, I think the game was actually pretty simple," continues Jones. "It was good to show a game with lots of characters rather than just one. Every part of the game was pixel-perfect when it came to things like collisions and terrain following." Nevertheless, *Lemmings* wasn't created without some headaches. "The whole game required a lot of RAM," laments Jones. "This limited the play area, and caused a lot of problems when porting the game, especially to console. Maintaining the speed with 120 lemmings on screen was a little tricky, but the game made as much use of the Amiga hardware as possible. This once again made life difficult when porting to other machines, but that was someone else's problem."

On its release *Lemmings* leaped headlong into the charts. The combination of its cuteness – Dailly's belief in character size clearly shining through – and strength as a puzzle game won it many accolades. There was something intrinsically alluring about saving those small sprites from their reckless movement towards certain death, although more sadistic gamers will remember the option to nuke all lemmings if the level was bodged. The game's celebrity was instant. "It was a great time," remarks Jones. "We had great review after great review. The game was in the top 20 for two years but most of the attention focused on Psygnosis, as they were the publisher. It's one of those things you have to accept in the world of videogames."

Timmons agrees: "It was an original concept with almost universal appeal that just seemed to hit the spot in the market. In the game, it was a lot of fun having direct control over one lemming at a particular point and then seeing the effect that had on all the other lemmings. Also, the appeal of the characters and the style of the music are two things that will probably be remembered for a long time. We were able to spend a lot of time working on the levels and grading them and we were generally quite pleased with the overall results."

But for those who only remember *Lemmings* as a brilliant if benign gaming experience, consider this: the game made network television in the US deep south for being an evil influence and inciting devil worship. "It seems that people over there were not happy with the style of the lava levels," laughs Jones. "The lemmings would jump into the mouth of a fire-breathing demon to finish the level, so they wanted the game banned, but luckily it never happened."



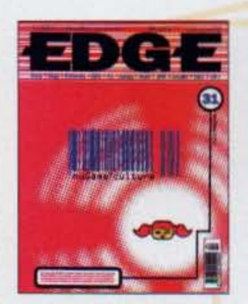


RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 31, April 1996

Gamers rejoice: it's almost five years since you were certified as socially acceptable. April 1996 saw **Edge** celebrate the charge of videogaming through to mainstream culture, with a coverline declaring the 'unsavoury image' well and truly ditched. Inside, frank interviews with musical luminaries such as The Shamen and Orbital's Phil Hartnoll revealed that pop stars like games too, and JVC's **John Rahim** astounded **Edge** with research showing that: "People who are into jungle are also really into videogames".

But it wasn't just about style for style's sake, as an alarmingly frank **Geoff Glendenning** revealed on Sony's behalf: "This [PlayStation projections on to walls] will let us put our subliminal messages in clubs – If people are in a club off their faces looking at PlayStation graphics, they'll associate them with all that's good in life."

Edge preferred to let the games themselves do the talking, with first looks at *Final Fantasy VII* and the Bitmap's sci-fi comedy RTS *Z*. Finally, **Chris Crawford** analogised his way through the theory of storytelling, pointing out that: "You can't get a duck by strapping swimming fins on a chicken." How true.



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"We have realtime audio on our server, so 'Shamen Radio' is not far off." The Shamen's **Colin Angus** looks to a utopian future with 24/7 'Ebeneezer Goode' access for all.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"Doh!" **Edge** concludes an interview with developer Adeline by commenting on its lack of involvement with 3DO's M2.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Grand Prix 2 (PC; 9/10), *Guardian Heroes* (Saturn; 8/10), *Time Gate* (PC; 6/10), *Alien Trilogy* (PS; 7/10), *Duke Nukem 3D* (PC; 8/10), *Big Red Racing* (PC; 7/10)



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1. An audience with Adeline gives **Edge** another shot at Francophilia 2. Archer MacLean celebrates signing to Virgin with a close friend 3. The Telecommunications Bill provokes blue ribbon outrage in netview 4. The PlayStation hype machine skates into action 5. *Big Red Racing*, the way PC games used to look 6. Sega's Model 3 technology, as demonstrated by *VF3*

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month **Tom Nettleship**, lead coder on *Malice*, fondly remembers laserdisc title *Space Ace*





The long winter months saw Nettleship turn to *Space Ace*'s visuals and storyline for fun

Growing up in a seaside town, there was only one thing to do in the winter: go down the seafront arcades where the machines were all on 10p a play, reduced from the ripoff summer prices. Most games were the standard sprite-based shoot 'em ups, race games and platform variants. The one title that really caught my eye was *Space Ace*.

Space Ace was one of the laserdisc games which gave the player a fairly linear experience, but with amazing cartoon visuals. These days they're derided as having poor gameplay, but back then, compared to the delights of *Pole Position*, they were amazing experiences which boasted stories.

The game itself was simple. You played as Dexter, who had to rescue his girlfriend Kimberley from the evil blue alien Borf. At times you could morph into his heroic alter-ego, Ace, which gave you the choice of multiple routes through the game.

The actual gameplay itself was very straightforward: you followed the story through a number of scenes and would progress by pressing the appropriate direction or action button dependent on a visual or audio cue, until you either reached the end or screwed up enough times to run out of lives.

It was just a simple memory test, really, but God, was it fun to play, and, as we've seen recently, this is still a valid gameplay mechanism – viz, *Shenmue*'s Quick Time Events.

FAQ

Cameron Sheppard

MD, Crawfish Interactive

Currently hard at work reviving the Cinemaware brand for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, **Cameron Sheppard** is MD of handheld specialist Crawfish Interactive. Check out **E**93's news for screenshots of *Wings* on GBA.

What was the first videogame you played?
It was either *Phoenix* or *Battle Zone* in the arcades.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
An Atari 2600 (I think).

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
A version of *Space Invaders* on the Talking Electronics Computer, which was a Z80-based microcomputer that was just a circuit board with a hex keyboard made out of buttons on top, and an 8x8 grid LED display.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
It was with Beam Software in Melbourne, Australia, formerly Melbourne House, and the first game I wrote was *NBA Allstar Challenge* on the Game Boy.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Probably *Phoenix*, as it reminds me of the times spent in the arcades in Melbourne, all those years ago.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
I think it was *Half-Life*, and I thought it was the most atmospheric FPS I've played.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
Not many at the moment. I have no time.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
Galaga, as it's one of the old ones usually still found in the arcades.

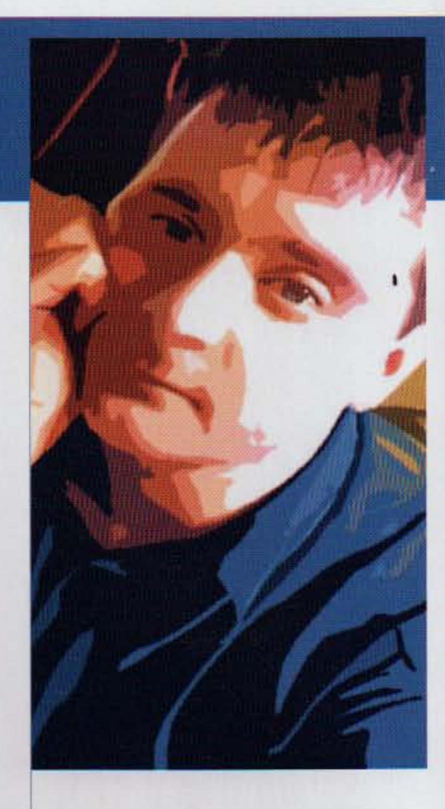
What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
Can't think of a book, but the album would be 'Still' by Joy Division, and the film probably 'Pulp Fiction', but anything by David Lynch, Stanley Kubrick, or Quentin Tarantino, really.

Which Web site do you most regularly visit?
Either FGNOnline or BBC Online.

"I think mobile phone gaming will really change the way handheld games are played, but it needs to be affordable"

Which game would you most like to have worked on?
Any of the old arcade classics.

Of all the games you've been involved with in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
Mortal Kombat 2 on the Game Boy – I programmed it, and I think it's the most playable version of the game there is.



What are you personally working on at the moment?
Building Crawfish Interactive up into a large, diversified studio.

And at what stage are you at?
We're halfway there.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
More immersive gameplay using VR technology, which should become more affordable.

What annoys you about the industry?
There's never enough time.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
Being able to be creative and inventive.

Whose work do you most admire?
SquareSoft for the quality and volume of content they squeeze into their games.

Which new platform are you most looking forward to?
Game Boy Advance.

What's do you think about mobile phone gaming?
I think it will really change the way handheld games are played, but it needs to be affordable.

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I read with interest what Toshihiro Nagoshi had to say about developing on new, high-spec machines in **E**92. He says it's impossible for smaller companies to develop top titles for these machines. Well, although a lot of developers may think this way, it doesn't have to be the case. I believe that qualifying as a quality game doesn't have to mean lifelike graphics with millions of polygons, huge playing arenas, or whatever, all of which take time and resources. You have to remember the 'game' part.

Smaller companies must have a better chance than anyone to produce the kind of games that are going to turn a few heads. Without the pressure of a big company, they have more of a free reign as to what they develop, giving them an opportunity to produce the next gaming phenomenon. The only obstacle may be the public they are designing for, a public that wants *Tomb Raider XIII* and FPSs.

Surely the emphasis has to be on gameplay, and you can get good gameplay irrespective of the number of polygons used or the expanse of the gameworld. Original ideas are few and far between, a far cry from days of old. With the rage for all things retro, somebody needs to take the next step and start designing games from a retro point of view, identifying all the things that made that period such a wonderful time to be a gamer. Such a job would not need masses of cash or time, just plain old creativity and imagination.

Darren Jackson, via email

Your assertion that smaller developers have more opportunity to turn heads raises some conflicting issues. On the one hand, a bunch of students working out of a garage, answering to no one apart from friends and perhaps the Internet gaming community for feedback, have more or less limitless freedom. In the commercial sector, however, even the smallest devcos, while not having to answer to layers of besuited internal upper management, retain vital responsibilities to game publishers and/or investors, which can, naturally, severely cloud creative considerations. In reality, only the most fortunate or astute small codeshops are afforded the freedom you speak of.

By its very nature, the handheld sector dictates that developers cannot get caught up in horrendously complex graphics engines – it's probably here that you should be looking for the rawness you allude to, especially with the arrival of Game Boy Advance.

When talking about piracy, a factor people seem to miss is delayed software. We are forced to sit and wait while gamers in America and Japan are playing the games we want. Meanwhile, release dates are put back, and slip again and again.

If the videogame industry is so worried about piracy, it could combat the issue by dropping prices and making sure that games are brought to the gamers. It is estimated that copied games cost £3bn, but what about when a pirated version is bought because the English version has been put back? Having waited for *FFIX* for some time, it is tempting to get a pirated copy rather than wait.

When it comes to the crunch, if games are made available at the same time across the globe, or at a lower price, people would buy them. Would you buy a pirated version if you knew you could get the full game – instructions and all – for a fraction more? I certainly wouldn't – I like my collection to look respectable as well as entertaining.

Andrew McGovern, via email

I can stand it no more. For 92 issues the levels of exaggerated claims from developers has risen exponentially, but now it would seem we are at bullshit saturation point.

I am sick to my back teeth of reading the most ridiculous claims from hot new developers regarding the number of polygons they can draw, or their newly invented super-complex AI algorithms.

I know, they know, the **Edge** staff know, in fact everybody reading **Edge** knows that they are talking complete bollocks, and that when the game finally emerges (late, probably), none of these fabulous features will be nearly as fantastic as when they were so lavishly described.

If I should read the phrase 'We have developed a physically accurate model of' one more time, I will rampage through my office like a demented fool, burning every copy of **Edge** I can find.

We've seen it all in **Edge**, from the racing games that have claimed to have modelled car engines with real physically moving parts, to games that claim to have highly accurate weather and ecosystems. These claims are so exaggerated that they are verging on blatant lies.

By all means developers should pursue the Holy Grail of perfectly modelled physical universes, and should be proud of their achievements. However, right here, right now, given the hardware and technical limitations, producing good approximations of these phenomena that capture the look and feel is more of a prerequisite than being physically accurate.

I'm afraid that for me, as a serious developer, with all these false claims **Edge** is turning into a bit of a gaming tabloid, something akin to the *Sunday Sport* with its equally unbelievable headlines like 'World War II Bomber Found On Moon'.



Andrew McGovern says that it's not simply game costs that create piracy. Having to wait for a western release of *FFIX* can tip the moral scales, he claims



Darren Jackson calls for smaller developers to get back to gaming's roots. New handheld tech such as Bandai's WonderSwan Color could be a catalyst

I feel ultimately that the responsibility lies with **Edge** journalists to switch on their bullshit detectors, and try to stem the flow of these self-important fakers before we are overrun.
Stuart Dell, via email
A visit to Tandy, and the heated discussion between an **Edge** correspondent and the poor shop assistant that ensued, revealed that bullshit detection technology does not, in fact, exist. So it must be put to you, sir, that you are in fact a faker of the first order yourself.

I was rather amused with the letter in **E**92 from Neil Armstrong, berating the decision by Lorne Lanning to ditch PS2 in favour of XBox. I was in a similar situation a few years back when Core and Eidos were in talks with Sony about making the *Tomb Raider* franchise a PlayStation exclusive. Incidentally, I am sure at that time a certain Mr Armstrong probably had a wry grin on his face at the expense of Saturn owners.

Did I feel bitter? Yes – for about ten seconds, and then I decided the best solution was to go and buy myself a PlayStation and a copy of *Tomb Raider II* when it arrived. There is no need for Lorne Lanning to respond, because there is no case to answer. You know that saying about having a chip on one's shoulder…
Paul Barrett, via email

Just a few words about your answer to Valan Chan in **E**91: no, technology is not my religion. I really believe in God, in the Catholic Church, and I am a practising Catholic. So, why didn't I write a letter regarding your inside cover images in **E**89?

I simply understand that **Edge** and I do not share the same view about religion. And my sensitivity is not so high as to be offended by those images. We share the same view about how to look at videogames, though.
Stefano Parravicini, via email

I read your editorial intro in the December 2000 issue and thought this a good opportunity to write. Yes, games are for our enjoyment. Whether that enjoyment comes from playing a mystical wizard, a creature from another world, or a real-life racing driver, as long as it provides enjoyment and challenge, it succeeds in what it set out to do.

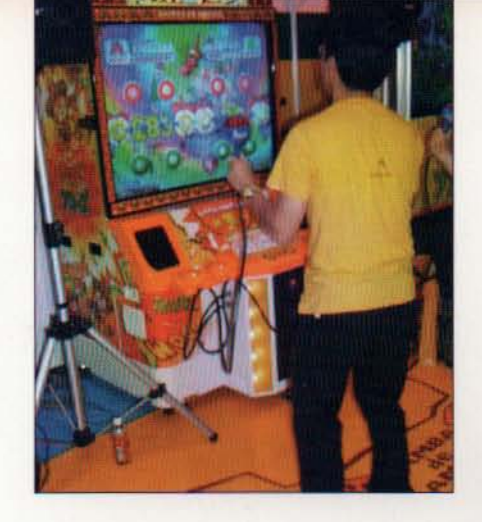
Real life can be challenging, rewarding and very entertaining, and often dull. Think about this: I will never drive a Formula One car. But I like to pretend I am a Formula One driver when playing a very good game based on the sport. I will never fly an F16. I will never be a spy who saves the girl. I can't play tennis like anyone in the top 100. But these things interest me, therefore if the opportunity comes along to taste these experiences, even in our relatively crude ways using a PS2, PC, etc, then yes, I will pay for the experience. On the other hand, if I want to fly to another galaxy and track down some space pirate that killed a fellow officer, great, I can do that too.

Think about the film 'Total Recall'. If that technology was available now, how many of us would jump at the chance to live out a fantasy for a while? And yes, it is a fantasy – the old suspension of disbelief is vital for a game to succeed when its aims are to have you think you are someone you are not. Imagine the emotional enjoyment of being able to live the fantasy and get the girl/guy when you save the planet/win the race/shoot the bad guy. Does this mean we don't all have lives that are fulfilling enough? Maybe. But hey, we all can't be the superhero, the best player, the best looking, the richest. So we fill our lives with what we can. We strive to be happy and if playing a game that lets me be someone I am not, but someone I'd like to be for a while, adds to the enjoyment of my life, there isn't anything wrong with that.

Balance is the key. What will happen in the future when we have the technology available to live out our fantasies? Will people become addicted? I guess it's the same old argument with different parameters, but the majority of us will take the opportunity to add a little spice to our lives, enrich them, and maybe learn something along the way. I mean, have you ever tried to get an F1 car off the grass without spinning in bloody circles while your kid sits there laughing at you?
Rob Jenkins, via email
E91's editorial intro was not a rallying cry for developers to throw all of their fantasy-related artwork out of the window (although some of the especially tiresome examples of orcs and goblins that continue to rear their misshapen heads deserve to have been strangled at birth). Rather, it was a recognition of a growing trend that will only continue to do just that – grow.

After reading issue 91's news story I can't help but think JAMMA president Kikahara-san's approach to invigorate the poor-performing coin-op industry is a large step in the wrong direction. To believe a better game board system is the answer is pure fantasy. While superior technology is welcome, it has not worked in the last few years. Sega's Model 3 board was well in advance of any home console (until the Dreamcast arrived), so why should it work now? In the arcades, the most recent successes have been Konami's Bemani

'Think about the film 'Total Recall'. If that technology was available now, how many of us would jump at the chance to live out a fantasy for a while?'



Shaun Dinsdale believes Sega's coin-op future lies in thinking where else it might install the likes of *Samba de Amigo*

efforts, and they have run on boards which have little more power than a PlayStation.

What Sega really needs to look at is what people are spending their disposable income on. Mobile phones proving so popular with today's youth cannot have helped the arcade industry, bearing in mind how much income is taken up with the price of calls. Also, the price to play the latest coin-ops has become far too costly for most gamers, with one credit demanding an outlay of up to £2. I think a lower per-play price and better location of coin-op machines would go a long way in improving Sega's revenue. If arcade games like *Samba de Amigo* were placed in high street music shops then think of just two possibilities:

1. People get to hear the latest music from various artists and be in a place where they could buy the CD by the artist in the game.

2. Greater accessibility to the public for such arcade titles.

Sega needs to figure out where arcade machines fit into the leisure industry. Arcades are too few in number to reach the mass market (I have to travel over ten miles to reach the nearest one!) and their appearance – mostly very dark and noisy – can be offputting. I'm a great fan of arcade gaming (I recently purchased my own cabinet) and would hate to see it disappear. To integrate traditional coin-ops with other leisure devices (as Capcom is doing) is the way forward, and I hope Kikahara-san will soon realise this.

Shaun Dinsdale, via email

As Nagoshi-san relates in this month's AV Out (p26), the mood in the Sega of Japan camp has been far from rosy, but the company's arcade divisions seem reluctant to halt innovation in terms of hardware or software content. Low-cost boards such as Namco's System 12 can retain committed arcade-goers, but more bleeding-edge technology is required to lure back those who've long since forgotten the delights of coin-op gaming. Is integration the real solution? As usual, the Japanese market will be the first to provide some form of an answer.

William Yately's comments [inbox, **E**92] regarding the cost of videogames (and shelf life) must have struck a chord with much of your readership, but his comparison that the game that costs £1m to make costs twice as much as a film that costs £100m to make are misleading and ill thought out.

A £100m film is not intended for the video and DVD market, it is designed to be shown in a cinema. By the time it reaches the shelves of HMV it has already been on the 'market' for at least six months. Video is a secondary market (albeit a very important one) for the distributor and film studio. The closest comparison for videogames is that video is the same as a Platinum release on PlayStation, at which point the pricing for both comes into line.

I agree that games do seem to be expensive, but there are some people with their fingers in the pie (developer, publisher, distributor, retailer, etc) that make me wonder: when the price of PS games dropped by £10 a while back, who lost the most money in the reduction?

John Worrell, via email

In response, a software publishing representative told **Edge** that, in the long term, it was his sector that was the biggest loser in this instance.

I have owned a PlayStation for about four years, and in that time have built up quite a large collection of games. Also, in that time I have built up a large number of electronic gadgets under my TV. So, I was relieved to hear that the PS2 would be backwards compatible. Brilliant, I thought, no need to find additional space to keep the good old PlayStation. I have recently celebrated my 27th birthday and was lucky enough to receive a PS2 from my wife.

So, after playing with the demo disc and watching some DVDs I decided to play one of my PlayStation games (*V-Rally 2*). From all the reviews I had read I expected the game to look and feel exactly how it did on its original target hardware. In fact I even suspected that it may look a bit smoother, but to my surprise it didn't. In fact, it looked more grainy and lower res than on a PS1. So I tried some other titles – and they all played the same but looked grainy.

I have two questions. First, I have read numerous PS2 hardware reviews, each trumpeting its backwards compatibility but none mentioning the quality of original PlayStation games when running on the new hardware. Surely at least one journo would have thought to check it out before regurgitating Sony's press release? Second, is this lack of visual resolution deliberate on Sony's part in an attempt to ensure that PS2 owners shell out for PS2 games?

That said, from what I've seen of native PS2 games so far I have been very impressed – *SSX* is brilliant.

Adam Leach, via email

The PS1 backward compatibility problem you cite hasn't been experienced by the **Edge** team (hence it not being reported here), nor by any of their contacts. Have any other readers suffered such hardware deficiencies?

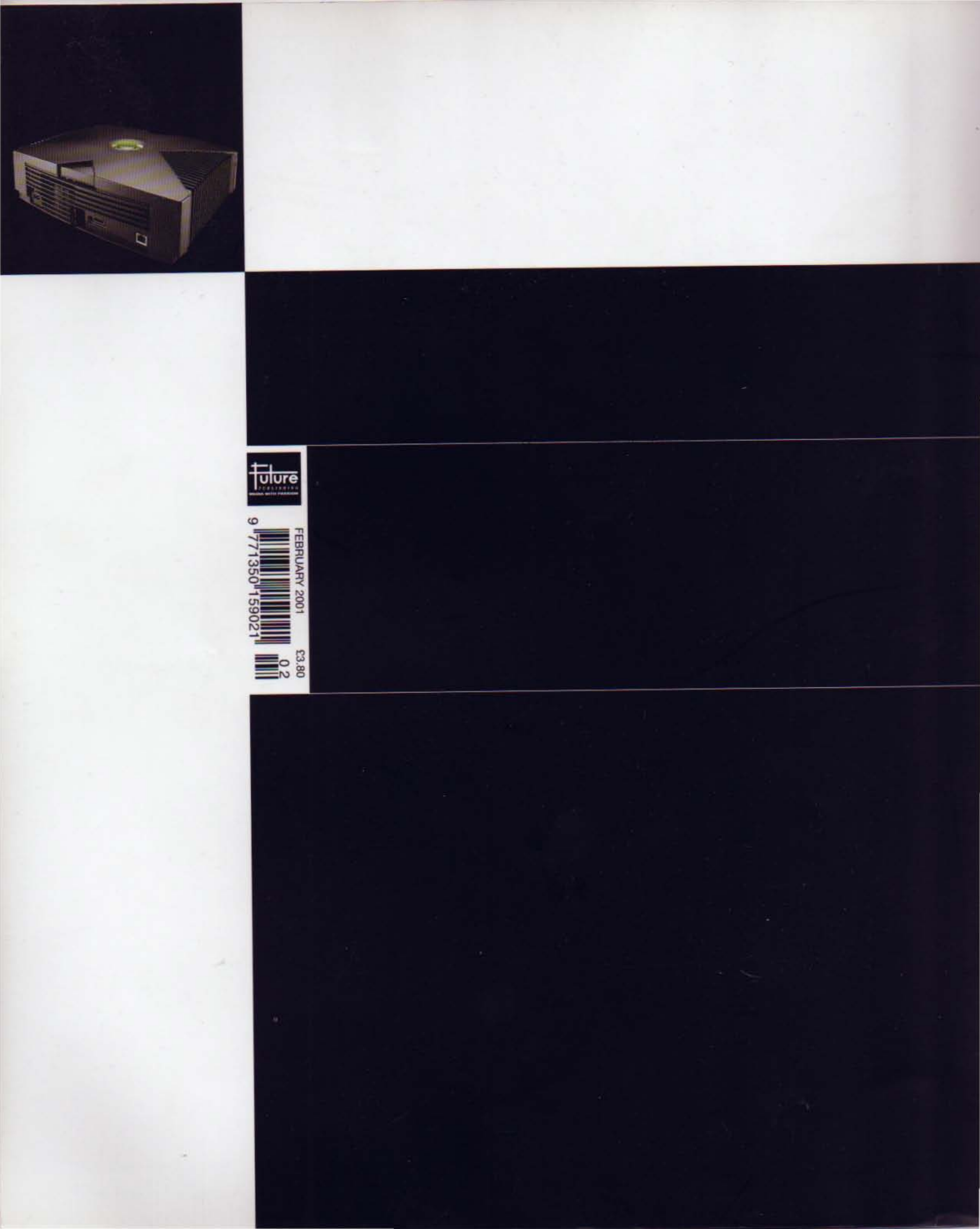
> 'Sega really needs to look at what people are spending their disposable income on. Mobile phones proving so popular cannot have helped the coin-op industry'



Playing Infogrames' *V-Rally 2* on PS2 hardware revealed some eye-opening backwards-compatibility issues to Adam Leach


Next month: all too real?
Edge explores the future of animation i
electronic entertainment, and looks a
how artists and technicians are furthe
blurring the lines between real and unrea
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